

**TOWARDS CHARACTERISING THE FEMALE SEXUAL OFFENDER:  
A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF RESEARCH ARTICLES**

by

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I declare that **TOWARDS CHARACTERISING THE FEMALE SEXUAL OFFENDER:  
A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF RESEARCH ARTICLES** is my own work and that all  
the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of  
complete references.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Minimal scientific research has been conducted regarding female sexual offenders within the South African context, despite its prevalence. This study explores behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders to gain an understanding of the phenomenon. This qualitative study in the form of a systematic review, focuses on the findings of ten original international research articles published from 2002 to 2012 regarding the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders. The epistemological foundation of this study was postmodernism and social constructionism. Three main themes and various subthemes emerged from the data by applying the thematic content analysis. The aim of this study was to explore the similarities and differences between the findings of the research articles. Lacunas in the existing literature were explored in an attempt to extend scientific knowledge on female sexual offenders. Finally, recommendations for future scientific studies on female sexual offenders were discussed.

Key terms: female sexual offender, sexual abuse, coercive control, typology of female sexual offenders, systematic review, social constructionist, postmodernism, thematic content analysis and qualitative research.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Introduction

Consider the following South African newspaper headlines on female sexual offending:



Figure 1.1: Collage of newspaper headlines published in The Star, Sowetan, Pretoria News, and The Citizen.

Despite the prevalence of female sexual offending in South Africa as reported by the media above, minimal scientific research has been conducted regarding female sexual offenders within the South African context. Little if any data is available on

this topic at present in South Africa. In this study, I explore the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offending to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of female sexual offenders. When sexual abuse and sexual perpetration are discussed, the popular image by society is that of a male perpetrator, while females and children are often considered to be the victims of such abuse. Although there have been many studies on male sexual offenders, few studies have been conducted on female sexual offenders. Thus, there is a serious lack of understanding regarding this phenomenon. This study is conducted by undertaking a systematic review of the findings of ten research articles published over the past ten years regarding female sexual offenders.

In this chapter, the background and importance of this study, as well as female sexual offending as represented by the South African media, will be discussed. Thereafter, I will discuss the research question and the aim of study. I will also define the main concepts. Finally, a chapter outline of the various chapters in this study will be provided.

## **Background**

My legal background, clinical psychology training, and professional interest in deviant behaviour motivated me to undertake a study on sexual offending. This research topic was further inspired by the highly publicised case of the female sexual offender, Cézanne Visser, popularly referred to as ‘Advocate Barbie’ by the media. Once I began my search into research on the phenomenon of female sexual offending within the South African context, I found that there was a lack of scientific literature available on the phenomenon in South Africa despite a number of highly publicised South African media reports involving female sexual offenders.

According to Kramer (2010), the South African Department of Correctional Service (DCS) had 3482 female offenders in December 2008. Of these female offenders, 24 committed sexual offences (Kramer & Bowman, 2011). Bailey (2008) mentions that less than 1% of sexual offenders in South Africa are females. However, Bailey (2008) cautions that these figures may not be accurate and believes that many of the sexual offences committed by females go unreported.

Kramer and Bowman (2011) indicate that South Africa has one of the highest rates of sexual abuse in the world committed by both female and male sexual offenders. A literature search on the available data in South Africa was conducted using the keywords 'female sex offenders' and 'female sexual offenders'. The search located one result within a South African journal. It should be noted that this search was not limited to any specific time period.

According to research on female sexual offending, there is also a serious lack of international research on the phenomenon (Harris, 2010; Hetherton, 1999; Warren & Hislop, 2001). Despite the lack of international and South African literature, Kramer and Bowman (2011) mention that, since the turn of the millennium, there has been an increase in the number of international research articles written on female sexual offending. Muskens, Bogaert, Van Casteren, and Labriijn (2011) also state that recently there have been a growing number of studies examining female sexual offending, yet female sexual offending remains under researched. Although female sexual offences constitute less than 1% of sexual offences within South Africa, many experts caution that female sexual offending remains unreported as stated above (Hetherton, 1999).

The lack of reporting female sexual offending may be due to the perspectives of the professionals, the public, and the victims involved as well as the handling of

female sexual offending by professionals, the public and the victims that sexual offenders are only male. Despite these factors, there are a number of cases of female sexual offending that have been reported by the South African media. Hence, there is a need to explore research articles on female sexual offending in more detail and to determine the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offending. Such an exploration may add to the scientific body of knowledge on the issue, particularly for the South African context.

### **Importance**

Although the number of incidents of female sexual offending is low in comparison to male sexual offending, it remains unacceptably high (Warren & Hislop, 2001). The impact of female sexual offending can be seen as being equally traumatic for the victim as male sexual offending, and therefore research on the phenomenon should be explored (Christiansen & Thyer, 2002). Giguere and Bumbly (2007) state that the understanding of female sexual offending is a significant area that needs attention within the criminal and juvenile justice fields. Until recently, the exploration of female sexual offenders has been overlooked by criminal justice professionals (Giguere & Bumbly, 2007). This oversight has resulted in little being known about this group of offenders (Giguere & Bumbly, 2007; Travin, Cullen, & Protter, 1990). According to Cortoni and Gannon (2011), sexual offences committed by females have been underrecognised and are considered to be an underresearched area.

By researching this phenomenon, this study will benefit psychologists, criminologists, and legal professionals working with the victims and perpetrators of female sexual offences. The information gained from the study may aid in forming rehabilitation and treatment programmes for female sexual offenders. It may further aid in establishing treatment programmes for the victims of female sexual offences.



To contribute to the knowledge and development of theories and to develop an understanding of female sexual offenders and female sexual offending, I make use of a systematic review to examine ten original research articles published over a ten year period from 2002 to 2012. The ten research articles were then analysed using a thematic content analysis. I summarise and synthesise the literature on female sexual offenders published over the past ten years in order to understand the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offending as defined later in the chapter.

The specified literature will be examined in order to consider the similarities and differences between the findings of the chosen studies conducted over the past ten years on female sexual offenders. A systematic review may also aid in identifying gaps in the existing literature. The research may also increase the scientific knowledge on female sexual offenders and female sexual offending.

In addition to the above, the study will also provide an opportunity for female sexual offenders to be studied within the South African research field. The literature review focuses on the phenomenon of female sexual offending, while also taking the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 hereafter referred to as the Sexual Offences Act(South Africa, 2007a) into account. Such a literature review aids in building on the existing typologies of female sexual offenders as well as in identifying possible gaps in the field of clinical psychology, criminology, and law regarding female sexual offences.

### **Research Question and Aims of the Study**

In this study, I explore the following research question: What are the findings of studies conducted over the past ten years on female sexual offenders regarding their behavioural and contextual characteristics? In this study, I aim to explore the similarities and differences between the findings of the chosen studies which have

been published over the past ten years with the aim to characterise the female sexual offender. In addition to this primary aim, I will consider the gaps in the existing literature in an attempt to extend the scientific knowledge on female sexual offenders. Finally, I will provide recommendations for future scientific studies on female sexual offenders.

### **Definition of Concepts**

The concepts ‘female sexual offender’ and ‘behavioural and contextual characteristics’ will be used throughout the dissertation. These concepts are defined below.

**The female sexual abuser and the female sexual offender.** According to Travin et al. (1990), the terms ‘sexual abuse’ and ‘sexual offence’ are often used interchangeably. Travin et al. (1990) suggest that using these terms interchangeably often leads to professionals failing to acknowledge the distinction between the terms ‘offence’ and ‘abuse’. Sexual abuse involves a sexual act that is perpetrated against an individual without their consent and where a charge of sexual abuse has not been made against the perpetrator (South Africa, 2007a). However, a sexual offence is the same behaviour, but it denotes a criminal act (Travin et al., 1990). This is because a charge of sexual abuse has been laid against the perpetrator (Travin et al., 1990). In this study, the acts of perpetration are defined in terms of the South African Sexual Offences Act, 32 of 2007 (South Africa, 2007a) as set out in Chapter Two.

Tsopelas, Spyridoula, and Athanasios (2011) further explain that little is known about the characteristics of female sex offenders, although much research has been carried out on female sexual abusers. This lack of knowledge on female sex offenders may further contribute to the underreporting of female sexual perpetrators because only the most overt acts of sexual abuse committed by females often come to

the attention of the criminal justice system (Tsopelas et al., 2011). This important factor leaves the true extent of female sexual offending relatively unknown.

If one takes Tsopelas et al.'s (2011) findings of the differences between sexual abuse and sexual offence into consideration, a distinction can be made between a female sexual offender and a female sexual abuser. A female sexual abuser is therefore a person who has abused children and/or adults, but has not been sentenced for the offence (Tsopelas et al., 2011). A female sex offender is a person who has been tried and sentenced for sexual offences against children and/or adults (Tsopelas et al., 2011). In the study, the research will be limited to research articles on female sexual offenders, also referred to as FSOs.

**Behavioural and contextualisation definitions.** According to Sadock and Sadock (2007), the term 'behaviour' refers to a way of behaving or conducting oneself. Such behaviour includes impulses, motivations, wishes, drives, instincts as well as cravings (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Therefore, behaviour is something that can be observed. The term 'behavioural' entails behaviour that is related to the acts or omissions of particular behaviour (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Thus, the term 'behavioural' could be seen as referring to an action, reaction, or a particular functioning of a system (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). The behaviour may occur within everyday or specific circumstances (Becvar & Becvar, 2009).

According to Becvar and Becvar (2009), 'contextual' refers to something which is related to something else, or something that depends on something else. Thus, the surrounding circumstances refer to the context. From the above definitions, it appears that the terms 'behavioural' and 'contextual' are interlinked.

In this study, I consider the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders to be interconnected. According to the systems perspective,

an individual can never be seen in isolation (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Therefore, it can be said that the behaviour of the female sexual offender can be related to her surrounding circumstances (the context). Similarly, the female sexual offender's context can be related to her behaviour. A female sexual offender's behaviour cannot be seen in isolation, but should be seen in relation to the context and visa versa. This approach is referred to as circularity (Becvar & Becvar, 2009).

I also consider personal characteristics (such as age, race, education, employment, and relationship status) as forming part of the female sexual offender's context as well as having an influence on the behaviour of the offender. This connection may also be apparent in the type of victim the offender offends against (Warren & Hislop, 2001). As a victim's age, gender, race, and their relationship to the offender may have an impact on the behaviour of the offender (such as influencing the type of offence), such details could also have an influence on the context in which the sexual abuse occurs (such as the offender acting as the victim's babysitter or teacher). The behaviour and context surrounding the sexual abuse also influence the consequences of the actions or behaviours of the female sexual offender. This approach of viewing the female sex offender is also in keeping with systemic thinking as it emphasises the function of behaviour within a specific context (Becvar & Becvar, 2009).

## **Chapter Outline**

I explore the content and the findings of ten original research articles published over the past ten years from 2002 to 2012 to determine the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders. In order to explore the research articles, I undertook a thorough literature review of female sexual offending. This

review was done in order to construct a coherent theoretical basis for the variables that I had to consider when analysing the data. The chapter outline is discussed below.

## **Chapter Two: Literature and Theory Review**

This chapter reviews the current literature available on female sexual offending. The chapter includes definitions of sexual abuse (as defined by South African legislation on sexual offences), the underreporting of female sexual offences, and the characteristics of female sexual offenders. A comparison is made between the characteristics of male and female sexual offenders. A typology regarding female sexual offenders is discussed. I also discuss theories on female sexual offences, which include multifactorial theories, single factor theories, and micro-level factor theories. The impact of female sexual abuse on both male and female victims is also discussed. Thereafter, I included the family systems perspective as an important perspective in furthering the understanding of female sexual offending.

## **Chapter Three: Research Method**

In this chapter, I set out the research paradigm used, which is social constructionism. This chapter also contains a discussion of the research process, an outline of the analysis by applying the thematic content analysis, and an interpretation of the research process. Thereafter, I consider the research design, namely a systematic review of the ten original research articles, the manner in which the research articles were located, and data collection strategies. I then discuss the process of thematic content analysis, credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

## **Chapter Four: Interpretation**

I discuss the findings of the study in this chapter. I identify three main themes by applying thematic content analysis. I also identify different subthemes which emerge from the three primary themes.

## **Chapter Five: Recommendations and Discussion**

The final chapter in this study provides links between the identified themes and subthemes. Links are also established between these themes and the literature and theory explored in Chapter Two. The strengths and limitations of the study are highlighted as well as recommendations for further research.

### **Conclusion**

Although female sexual offending comprise less than 1% of sexual offending within South Africa, many experts caution that female sexual offending remains hidden (Kramer & Bowman, 2011). This may be due to professionals, publics, as well as victims perspective on female sexual offending. Despite these perceptions there are a number of cases that have been reported by the South African media on female sexual offending (Refer to Figure 1.1). However there is a need to explore research reports on female sexual offending and to determine the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offending as this may add to the scientific body of knowledge particularly within the South African context.

## **Chapter Two: Literature and Theory Review**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I focus on the relevant literature that is available on female sexual offenders. I also define sexual abuse according to South African legislation on sexual offences, and I explore the underreporting of female sexual offences as well as the characteristics of female sexual offenders. Thereafter, a comparison between the characteristics of male and female sexual offenders is given and discussed. The typologies of female sexual offenders are also discussed. Multi-factor, single-factor, and micro-level factor theories regarding female sexual offenders are explained. Finally, the impact of female sexual abuse on the victims of such abuse is highlighted. I conclude this chapter with the family systems theory perspective on female sexual abuse.

Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has been well established that both females and males commit sexual abuse (Tsopelas et al., 2011). Hetherton's (1999) study and Mandelblatt's (2007) study both illustrate that sexual offences committed by females are generally hidden both to idealise women and because of socio-cultural influences, professional bias, and the victims' unwillingness to report these sexual offences. One of the results of these sexual offences being hidden is that there are a limited number of theories available regarding female sexual offenders.

Harris (2010) believes there are a limited number of theories regarding female sexual offenders because criminologists and psychologists have remained ignorant to the possibility of females committing sexual offences. As a result, female sexual offending is seen as atypical, isolated, and inconsequential (Cortoni & Gannon, 2011; Hetherton, 1999). Theories of female sexual offending and the development of theories on female sexual offenders are important because significant dimensions and

understandings that are unique to female sexual offenders may be neglected if male theories of sexual offending are applied directly to female sexual offenders (Harris, 2010).

### **Defining Sexual Abuse: South African Legislation on Sexual Offences**

There is no simple definition for sexual abuse as the concept remains multifaceted. However, for the purpose of this study, the criteria regarding sexual offences as set out in the relevant pieces of South African legislation are used to define sexual abuse. In South Africa, sexual abuse is defined in terms of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (South Africa, 2007a). On 16 December 2007, the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) came into operation and implemented the punishment of sexual offences falling within the ambit of this Act. I believe that the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) remains one of the most comprehensive, yet complicated pieces of legislation available. This Act also highlights the difficulties of defining sexual abuse within South Africa.

The Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) replaces some of the common law provisions regarding sexual offences as well as some previous laws in terms of the Sexual Offences Act 23 of 1957 (South Africa, 1957). The Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) also makes provision for the creation of a number of new sexual offences, and thus it comprehensively defines sexual abuse within the South African context. This Act repealed the common law rape offence and replaced it with an expanded statutory offence of rape (South Africa, 2007a). The Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) states that rape includes all forms of sexual penetration without a person's consent, irrespective of the person's gender. The effects of the above-mentioned changes are that the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a)



ensures that both men and women are protected by and are liable to abide by such legislation. The Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) also makes provision for the establishment of a national register listing all sexual offenders in South Africa (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007; South Africa, 2007a).

This study focuses on female sexual offenders as defined in Chapter One. Hence, all females who have been charged and convicted of a sexual offence fall within the ambit of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a). As mentioned in Chapter One, the terms ‘sexual offence’ and ‘sexual abuse’ are used interchangeably in this study.

### **Defining Sexual Abuse**

The Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) gives a definition for sexual abuse and determines which sexual acts are considered to be sexual offences within the South African context. In terms of the Sexual Offences Act, the sexual offences discussed below are considered to be forms of sexual abuse (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007; South Africa, 2007a).

**Rape and compelled rape.** According to Section 3 of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a), rape includes “an act of sexual penetration” (p. 20) including any act

which causes penetration to any extent whatsoever by –

(a) the genital organs of one person into or beyond the genital organs, anus, or mouth of another person;

(b) any other part of the body of one person or, any object, including any part of the body of an animal, into or beyond the genital organs or anus of another person; or

(c) the genital organs of an animal, into or beyond the mouth of another person. (p. 16)

According to Section 4 of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a), compelled rape occurs when any person “unlawfully and intentionally compels a third person (‘C’), without the consent of C, to commit an act of sexual penetration of a complainant (‘B’), without the consent of B” (p. 20).

**Sexual assault.** According to Section 5 of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a), sexual assault occurs when a perpetrator “unlawfully and intentionally sexually violates a complainant (‘B’), without the consent of B” (p. 20). This section replaces the common law provision of indecent assault (South Africa, 2007a). Sexual violation includes acts such as the following: “direct or indirect contact” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 16) between the genital organs, anus of a person or a female’s breasts and “any part of the body of another person or an animal, or any object” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 16).

These acts include “the mouth of one person” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 16) and the genital organs, breasts, or anus of another person as well as any other part of another person that may “cause sexual arousal or stimulation” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 16). Such parts that may cause sexual arousal further include “any object resembling the genital organs or anus of a person, and in the case of a female, her breasts, or an animal” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 16) as well as “mouth of the complainant and the genital organs or anus of an animal” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 16).

Furthermore, such acts also include “masturbation of one person by another person” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 16), or the “insertion of any object resembling or representing the genital organs of a person or animal, into or beyond the mouth of another person” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 16). Thus, for example, if one person kisses

another without their consent, the act will fall under the definition of sexual assault. Sexual assault also includes “compelled sexual assault” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 20) and “compelled self-sexual assault” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 20), such as forcing a person to masturbate.

According to Section 8 and 9 of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a), other forms of sexual assault against adults include doing the following:

- compelling or causing persons 18 years or older to witness sexual offences,
- sexual acts or self-masturbation, exposure or display of or causing exposure or display of genital organs, anus or female breasts (‘flashing’), child pornography to persons 18 years or older or engaging sexual services of persons 18 years or older. (p. 22)

The Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) makes provision for traditional cultural practices that can be used as a defence.

**Sexual offences against children.** Chapter 3 of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) deals with sexual offences against children. Section 57 of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) states that “a male or female person under the age of 12 years is incapable of consenting to a sexual act” (p. 72). However, a child who is over the age of 16 years old is able to give consent to participate in sexual acts (South Africa, 2007a).

If a child between the ages of 12 years old and 16 years old consents to a sexual act, the case could be handled in one of two ways (South Africa, 2007a). The first way of dealing with such a case is that the other party can be charged with “consensual sexual penetration of a child” (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 8). The second way of dealing with such a case is that the other party can be charged with “the consensual sexual assault

of a child” (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 8). “Consensual sexual penetration” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 6) of a child is also referred to as “statutory rape”(South Africa, 2007a, p. 24) according to Section 15 of the Sexual Offences Act. Consensual sexual penetration of a child can also be referred to as a “consensual sexual violation”(South Africa, 2007a, p. 26) of a child between 12 and 16 years old according to Section 16 of the Sexual Offences Act. Where the child does not give consent, the perpetrator must be charged with rape or sexual assault (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007; South Africa, 2007a).

Another punishable sexual crime that was created by the Sexual Offences Act (Section 17) is the exploitation of children for any personal gain (South Africa, 2007a). In terms of this provision, it does not matter whether the person consented or did not consent to the sexual act. This provision also criminalises any involvement in the sexual exploitation of a child [Section 17(2)] as well as any involvement in furthering the sexual exploitation of a child [Section 17(3)] (South Africa, 2007a). Such involvement includes intentionally allowing another person to perform sexual acts involving a child while being the child’s “primary care-giver ... parent or guardian” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 26). This involvement also includes if a person owns, occupies, or leases property and intentionally allows the property to be used by another person to commit sexual acts against a child (South Africa, 2007a).

Section 17 (4) of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) makes provision for the criminalisation of “benefiting from the sexual exploitation of a child” (p. 28). Section 17 (5) of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) makes provision for the criminalisation of promoting child sex tours (such as when one person “makes or organises any travel arrangements for or on behalf of a third person

... with the intention of facilitating the commission of any sexual act with a child” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 28). This section also criminalises the printing and/or publishing of any information that promotes sexual acts with a perpetrator (South Africa, 2007a).

According to Section 18 of the Sexual Offences Act, “sexual grooming [of a child] refers to the process of preparing or making a child ready to engage in a sexual act. [Sexual] [g]rooming usually takes place over a period of time” (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 11). The process of grooming may appear in various ways, such as attempting to befriend a child and playing “secret games” (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 11) with the child in order to prevent the child from reporting the crime. As time progresses, the friendship may become more affectionate and may progress to different levels of sexual acts (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007).

Section 18 of the Act also includes the criminalisation of promoting the sexual grooming of a child (South Africa, 2007a). Section 21 criminalises the act of “compelling or causing children to witness sexual acts” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 32), and Section 22 criminalises the act of exposing one’s “genital organs, anus or female breasts” (South Africa, 2007a, p. 32) to children.

**Pornography.** Pornography is also criminalised under the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a). Pornography includes the following acts summarised from the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a, pp. 12-14):

- any image or description of a person engaged in a sexual crime, sexual penetration, or sexual violation;
- acts of self-masturbation;

- the displaying of the genital organs or female breasts of a person in a state of arousal or stimulation;
- the unduly displaying of the genital organs or anus of a person;
- engagement in sexually suggestive acts or acts that are vulgar/lewd; and
- engagement in sadistic or masochistic acts of a sexual nature or being the subject thereof.

Pornography also includes the following (South Africa, 2007a):

showing or describing the body, or parts of the body, of such a person in a manner or in circumstances which, within the context, violate or offend the sexual integrity or dignity of that person or any category of persons under the age of 18 years (p. 14)

Acts related to pornography include the following (South Africa, 2007a):

- “exposure or display of or causing exposure or display of child pornography to persons 18 years or older” (p. 6);
- “exposure or display of or causing exposure or display of child pornography or pornography to children” (p. 8);
- “using children for or benefitting from child pornography” (p. 8);
- “exposure or display of or causing exposure or display of child pornography or pornography to persons who are mentally disabled” (p. 8); and
- “using persons who are mentally disabled for pornographic purposes or benefitting there from” (p. 8).

Section 27 of the Film and Publications Act 65 of 1996 makes it a crime to “possess, create, import, obtain or distribute a film or publication which contains child

pornography or advertises child pornography or the sexual exploitation of children” (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 15). Furthermore, the Film and Publications Act also makes anyone who is aware of such practices responsible for reporting these incidents to the South African Police Service (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007).

**Other sexual offences.** Adult sex work and engaging in the sexual services of adults (Section 11) have also been criminalised under the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a). The Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) also makes provision for sexual offences that have been committed against “persons who are mentally disabled” (p. 32) (Section 23 and 24). Furthermore, the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) repealed the previous common law crimes of incest (Section 12), bestiality (Section 13), and sexual acts with a corpse (Section 14). These crimes are now statutory offences and are included in the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a).

**Trafficking in persons.** South Africa is currently a signatory of and is legally bound by the *United Nations (UN) Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons* (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007). The effect of this agreement is that South Africa is responsible for enforcing these international rules on trafficking in the South African context (in other words, regarding the sale of human beings between South Africa and other countries) (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007). According to the Centre for Applied Legal Studies and the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre (2007), the South African Law Reform Commission is currently considering the option of reviewing these laws. According to

the Centre for Applied Legal Studies and the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre (2007), “[i]n the interim, the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act* has temporary provisions relating specifically to trafficking for sexual purposes. Trafficking in children is dealt with in Chapter 18 of the *Children’s Act*” (p. 18). These provisions will remain in place until a more comprehensive system is enacted in South Africa (Centre for Applied Legal Studies and the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007).

### **Elements of Sexual Offences**

In terms of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a), there are two important elements that need to be met in order for a sexual offence to have been committed – firstly, there must be the “intention of the perpetrator ... to commit a sexual offence” (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 3), and secondly, there must be the “absence of consent from the complainant” (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 3).

It is the duty of the court to decide whether the complainant did or did not give consent, or whether the complainant was coerced into various sexual acts (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007). A complainant is considered to be unable to give consent in the following circumstances (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, pp. 3-4; South Africa, 2007a, p. 18).

- when the complainant is asleep, unconscious, and/or unable to think properly due to intoxication caused by substances or alcohol;
- when the complainant is a person below the age of 12 years old; and
- when the complainant is a person with a mental disability.



The above circumstances indicate that even if a complainant agrees to participate in an act, they would be unable to give “proper consent” (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 4). In terms of the Sexual Offences Act, these circumstances would thus result in the classification of a sexual offence (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007).

**Duty to report.** It is also important for the provisions of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) to be read with other applicable legislation, such as the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 (South Africa, 2005) and the Children’s Amendment Act of 2007 (South Africa, 2007c). According to Section 110 (1) of the Children’s Amendment Act (South Africa, 2007c), if a person reasonably suspects that a child has been abused in a way that has caused physical injury, that a child has been sexually abused, or that a child has been deliberately neglected by their caregivers, the following professionals are obligated to report such a crime:

- correctional officials;
- homeopaths;
- immigration officials;
- labour inspectors;
- legal practitioners;
- medical practitioners;
- dentists;
- midwives;
- nurses;
- religious ministers;
- occupational therapists;

- speech therapists;
- psychologists;
- social services professionals;
- social workers;
- teachers;
- traditional health practitioners;
- traditional leaders; and
- members of staff or volunteer workers working at a partial care facility, drop-in centre, or child and youth care centre. (p. 44)

These individuals are obligated to report the suspected abuse either to a child protection agency (such as Childline), a social worker, or a police official (South Africa, 2007c, p. 44). Section 110(2) of the Children's Amendment Act (South Africa, 2007c) also states that "any person who on reasonable grounds believes that a child is in need of care and protection may report that belief to the provincial department of social development, a designated child protection organisation or a police official" (p. 44).

These provisions are in line with Section 54 of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) which also states that any person who has knowledge of a sexual crime or "sexual offences [committed] against children or persons who are mentally disabled" (p. 68) is responsible for reporting such a sexual crime. According to the Centre for Applied Legal Studies and Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre (2007), this section has been included in the hope that mandatory reporting of sexual crimes may uncover a number of sexual crimes that are underreported by communities. However, it is possible that mandatory reporting of crimes "may discourage children and others [affected by such crimes] from accessing healthcare and other services

(Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 20).

### **Sentencing and Punishment of Sexual Offences**

In terms of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 105 of 1997 (South Africa, 1997), there are minimum sentences for rape, namely the following:

- first offences will receive a minimum sentence of 10 years;
- second offences will receive a minimum sentence of 15 years; and
- third offences will receive a minimum sentence of 20 years.

According to the Centre for Applied Legal Studies and Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre (2007), in certain circumstances, a conviction of rape can lead to a minimum life imprisonment sentence of 25 years imprisonment. Such a sentence may occur, for example, in cases where a complainant is raped more than once, if they are gang raped, if they are under the age of 16 years old, or if they are physically disabled or mentally ill (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007). Such a sentence may also be applied if the accused person has a previous rape conviction, or if the accused person knew that they were HIV positive at the time of committing the rape (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007). The courts are allowed to deviate from the prescribed minimum sentences where there are “substantial and compelling circumstances [which may] ... justify a lesser sentence” (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 27).

When considering the sentence of an accused person, the courts will consider factors such as the “complainant’s previous sexual history” (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 27), “the apparent lack of physical injury to the complainant” (Centre for Applied Legal Studies &

Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 27), the accused person's "cultural or religious beliefs" (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 27) regarding rape as well as the relationship that "existed between the accused and the complainant" (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007, p. 27) before the rape occurred. As part of the sentence of a sexual offender, Section 276A of the Criminal Law Procedure Act (South Africa, 1977) makes provision for treatment programmes as a form of punishment for convicted sex offenders. This punishment includes attending and participating in specific treatment programmes for sex offenders (South Africa, 1977).

In these cases, the convicted sex offender needs to prove that they have the potential to benefit from such treatment, and they should also pay for the cost of the treatment programme (South Africa, 1977). However, the Criminal Law (Sentencing) Amendment Act (South Africa, 2007b) does not specify the terms and conditions of such a treatment programme (for example, the attendance of necessary sessions, the evaluation process, how the programme is established, or who is experienced to run such a programme).

According to the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a), the names of all sexual offenders should be placed on the National Register for Sex Offenders. This register makes it impossible for sex offenders who have been convicted of a sexual offence against children or people who are mentally ill to apply for employment under certain circumstances (such as working at a children's school or becoming a foster parent) (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007).

The National Register for Sex Offenders is confidential; however, all prospective employers are able to verify if a prospective employee is on the list

(Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007).

These employers are entitled to a certificate which states whether a person's name is on the list or not (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007). The convicted sex offender may apply for their name to be removed from the register after five to ten years, unless the offender was sentenced to more than 18 years of imprisonment (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007). In a case where the offender was sentenced to more than 18 years of imprisonment, the offender's name will not be removed from the list (South Africa, 2007a).

The National Register for Sex Offenders was introduced following a law commonly referred to as 'Megan's Law' that was passed in the United States of America (USA) (Chiotti, 2009). This register was an expansion of the 1994 Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children and Sexually Violent Offender Registration Act (Chiotti, 2009). Artz (2007, cited in Barnes, 2007) states that the reason the register has been so effective in the USA is that it has a good circle of professionals (such as a group of social workers, police, probation officers, and law professionals) to monitor the list. However, Artz (2007, cited in Barnes, 2007) is of the opinion that the South African Government does not have the infrastructure to implement such a list effectively.

According to the South African Press Association (SAPA), the then Minister of Justice, Jeff Radebe, stated that there were 590 sexual offender cases registered on the National Register for Sexual Offenders in 2010 (South African Press Association, 2010). However, it is unclear as to how many of these sexual offenders were female. The Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) provides protection against the victimisation of sexual offending, and it makes the perpetration of sexual offences a

criminal offence. Thus, the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) creates protection against such crimes and holds people responsible for such crimes, irrespective of their gender.

The preamble of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a), which sets the tone for reading and contextualising the Act, emphasises the importance of protecting women and children as victims of sexual offences. This fact further ignores the possibility that females could also be sexual offenders. This finding may be in line with Denov's (2001) study which found that every time the phenomenon of female sexual offending is explored, there are attempts made by criminal justice and mental health professionals to ignore the phenomenon. According to Denov (2001), ignoring female sexual offending may have an impact on the manner in which the sexual offenders construct themselves as characteristically female-maternal, passive, victimised, and naturally good.

The preamble of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) further states that the commission of sexual offences within society reflects the deep-seated and systematic dysfunction present within society. If society and professionals continue to ignore or to minimise the issue of female sexual offending, everyone involved could be harmed (such as the victims, the perpetrators, and the families of both parties). If the problem of female sexual offending is ignored, it may contribute to a limited understanding and recognition of the phenomenon of female sexual offenders.

### **Underreporting of Female Sexual Offenders**

Sexual offences committed by both men and women are considered to be underreported, in general, because of the inherent nature of sexual abuse (Harris, 2010). According to Christiansen and Thyer (2002) and Giguere and Bumby (2007), the information available on adolescent and adult female sexual offenders constitutes

a small amount of the research available on sexual offences. However, it is doubtful whether the available information accurately reflects the extent of female sexual offending (Giguere & Bumby, 2007). Hetherton (1999) and Vandiver (2006) suggest that there are several reasons for the underreporting of sexual offences in general, particularly when these offences are committed by friends, relatives, or even caretakers. These factors may contribute to an individual not wanting to report the offence because of fear of the loss of the relationship (Hetherton, 1999; Vandiver, 2006).

Victims that are part of vulnerable populations, such as children and mentally disabled individuals, may not recognise that sexual behaviour perpetrated by females is an offence (Terry, 2006). The victim may also feel that the sexual abuse was their fault so they then refrain from reporting the incident/s, or they may then fear the consequences (both represented by the criminal justice system and the perpetrator) of reporting these offences (Terry, 2006).

In general, sexual offences are difficult to detect because, unlike physical abuse where the bruises are visible, there are often very few, if any, signs of sexual abuse (Cortoni & Gannon, 2011; Vandiver, 2006). The difficulty of detecting sexual abuse may further contribute to victims being unwilling to report the sexual offences because of difficulties in proving the occurrence of the sexual offence (Cortoni & Gannon, 2011).

In a South African study conducted by Kramer (2010) on the discourses about female sexual offending, it was found that female sexual offenders often rely on the social constructions of men, women, motherhood, and sexuality. Thus, gendered and sexualised constructions continue to structure broader understandings of identity (Denov, 2001). Thus, society has a tendency to place people into groups and to give

these groups of people a meaning and an identity. In Kramer's(2010) study, these constructed realities had powerful social and psychological effects on the participants' constructions of themselves. Therefore, it is my perception that the manner in which society constructs females, results in the view that females are the victims of sexual offending and, therefore cannot be perpetrators. These constructions may prevent victims of female sexual offending reporting the sexual abuse.

According to Kramer (2010), patriarchal discourse and restricted reference of female sexual perpetration as a result of societies constructions may unintentionally protect female sexual offenders. Consequently, society's constructions of females and the unintentional protection of female sexual offenders effects the lack of discussion on female sexual abuse at various levels such as at the level of academia, within legal circles, or within the public sphere (Kramer, 2010). General unwillingness to address these topics affects the manner in which female sexual offenders perceive themselves as sexual perpetrators, which, in turn, may affect the manner in which victims of female sexual offenders deal with female sexual offending (Denov, 2001). Kramer (2010) and Saradjian (2010) state that, by allowing discussions on female sexual offending, victims of female sexual abuse will be able to report incidents of such abuse and the legal profession will be able to take these cases seriously.

According to Christiansen and Thyer (2002), Giguere and Bumby (2007), and Hetherton (1999), sexual offences committed by females are hidden because of several reasons, namely socio-cultural influences, professional bias, lack of scientific research, and victim concerns. These factors are discussed below.

### **Socio-Cultural Influences**

According to Hetherton (1999), Travin et al. (1990), and Vandiver (2006), female sexual offending remains more underreported than male sexual offending.



Vandiver (2006) and Warren and Hislop (2001) mention that the public is often perplexed when a female is charged with a sexual offence as many people believe that females are incapable of committing rape or other sexual offences. According to Giguere and Bumby (2007) and Vandiver (2006), the perception that males are incapable of being physically aroused if they are unwilling participants in sexual intercourse reflects a limitation in people's understandings of physiological responses.

This incorrect perception also suggests a limited view of female offending and sexual victimisation, namely that such crimes only involve members of the opposite sex (Warren & Hislop, 2001). At a macro level of society, sexual offending is considered to be a male-only crime (Christiansen & Thyer, 2002; Giguere & Bumby, 2007; Travin, et al., 1990). However, socio-cultural views have a profound impact on the professionals involved with sexual offences as well as the perceptions of victims in reporting female perpetrators (Denov, 2001).

### **Professional Bias**

Violent offences are often associated with males, while females are seen as passive and submissive (Hetherington, 1999; Vandiver, 2006). This socio-cultural view is further adopted at a micro level by organisational structures such as law enforcement agencies and other professionals (Vandiver, 2006). The adoption of this socio-cultural view could arise because gender role stereotypes regarding females usually centre on females being nurturing and being less likely to engage in aggression or in harming others (Hetherington, 1999; Vandiver, 2006).

Franklin and Fearn (2008) and Giguere and Bumby (2007) found that training for law enforcement is generally oriented towards viewing men as sexual offenders and women as victims. This specific orientation may impact on the responses of law enforcement officials regarding female offenders' sexual offences (Franklin & Fearn,

2008). Giguere and Bumby (2007) further stipulate that police officers might react with disbelief to allegations involving female suspects of sexual offences. As a result of these reactions, sexual offences committed by females may be less likely to be reported and may not be pursued actively by child welfare, the criminal justice system, and/or other relevant authorities (Giguere & Bumby, 2007).

Due to the impact of both socio-cultural factors and professional bias, it is possible that only the most overt acts of sexual abuse committed by females come to the attention of the criminal justice system, which further distorts the understanding of this phenomenon (Travin et al., 1990). Christiansen and Thyer's (2002) study and Hunter and Mathews' (1997) study indicate that the lack of public and professional cognisance of female sexual offending has a detrimental effect on both the victim and the perpetrator because it deprives both of these parties from familial and professional support as well as effective intervention programmes. Deering and Mellor (2009) and Kramer (2010) state that, as a consequence of the disbelief regarding female sexual offending, the legal system treats female sexual offenders with greater leniency than it does male sexual offenders. Kramer (2010) also states that the legal system and society in general are sceptical about the existence of female sexual offending.

Another reason proposed for the difficulty of recognising female sexual offending is that professionals may consider female sexual offenders harmless, despite research conducted on the short-term and long-term effects of female sexual offences on victims (Vandiver, 2006). Female sexual offenders may go unnoticed as their sexual offences are disguised by their care-giving roles (Hetherington, 1999). These roles may include participating in routine care-giving activities, such as bathing and dressing. Females who have committed a sexual offence with a male offender are often seen as less culpable than their male partners (Vandiver, 2006). People may also

not consider these types of behaviours to be sexual abuse, which further distorts the understanding of the phenomenon.

### **Victims Unwilling to Report Abuse**

Influences on both a macro and micro level have an impact on the manner in which the victim perceives a case of sexual abuse as being a sexual offence (Terry, 2006). Such influences also affect the victim's reporting of the sexual offence (Terry, 2006). Socio-cultural factors and professional bias may have a negative impact on the victim's willingness to disclose this information because of shame, guilt, fear, and threats (Terry, 2006).

Giguere and Bumby (2007) use the example of an adolescent girl who may be unwilling to disclose a sexual offence committed by another female because of the fear that her peers may question her sexual identity. Adolescent boys and adult males may be unwilling to report victimisation by a female because of the fear that they will be emasculated (Terry, 2006). The case of male victims may be further complicated if these victims felt sexually aroused at the time of the offence, which may cause them to question whether their experience was a sexual offence or a consensual act (Giguere & Bumby, 2007).

Terry (2006) also mentions that victims may be unwilling to report sexual abuse because they have to acknowledge that the abuse actually took place by reporting it. Other reasons for not reporting the abuse may be that the offender is the victim's mother or caregiver, or the offender may be the child's only caretaking adult present in their life (Terry, 2006). The child may therefore not report the sexual abuse as their basic needs of security and survival may be jeopardised (Saradjian, 2010). The impact of female sexual abuse will be discussed later in this chapter.

## **Lack of Scientific Research**

The available research on female sexual offenders is limited and, as a result, little is known about these offenders in comparison with male sexual offenders. It also appears that the research available on female sexual offenders is largely based on convicted offenders and small samples (Christiansen & Thyer, 2002). These factors can also be explained in terms of the victims' unwillingness to report these offences. Victims being unwilling to report offences may also contribute to the lack of knowledge on treatment and policy-making decisions as well as the implementation of these policies (Christiansen & Thyer, 2002; Giguere & Bumby, 2007; Vandiver, 2006).

The lack of research regarding female sexual offending may also affect further research development on the phenomenon. I believe that the phenomenon of female sexual offending remains largely under researched because of the general lack of willingness to research something that appears to be relatively harmless. This perception may also be evident in the low incidence rate of female sexual offending. In my experience, gaining access to research participants remains difficult because of a lack of support from institutions as a result of the media attention that often surrounds such offences.

In my experience institutions may also be unwilling to support such research because of the fear of controversy regarding the research topic as well as the sensitive nature of sexual abuse. It is also likely that the participants will be difficult to access because of their general unwillingness to disclose their stories, as discussed above. Furthermore, these offenders are regarded as vulnerable and sharing their stories may have an impact on their victims, which may in turn have legal implications such as applying for parole. As above-mentioned, according to Harris (2010), researchers'

unwillingness to research the phenomenon, trouble when gaining access to female sexual offenders, and the lack of support from institutions all contributes to psychologists and criminologists remaining ignorant regarding the phenomenon of female sexual offenders.

Despite the lack of research on female sexual offences and the lack of support for such research, experts agree that the understanding of female sexual offenders remains a significant area that needs attention within the criminal justice system and other professional fields (Giguere & Bumby, 2007). Researchers may inadvertently define sexual victimisation in a manner that reflects behaviour involving male perpetrators because researchers generally believe that sexual offences are only committed by males, while females are usually considered to be victims (Hetherington, 1999). I believe that these factors could affect the research methodologies used –for example, males are generally asked about their perpetration experiences, whereas females are asked about their victimisation experiences.

Research on female sexual offenders consists of small samples based mainly on international research. International research has made a valuable contribution to the understanding of female sexual offenders; however, it is also important to consider other factors such as culture which may contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon in a South African context. Studies, such as Kramer's (2010) study, that have researched female sexual offenders within a South African context have made significant contributions to the understanding of female sexual offending, particularly with regard to the opinions of professionals and the public regarding female sexual offenders as well as the social construction of gender and female sexual offending. Despite these valuable contributions, aspects such as the behavioural and

contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders in a South African context remain relatively under researched.

### **Characteristics of Female Sexual Offenders**

Despite the underreporting of female sexual offenders, the research available on female sexual offenders describes characteristics that are specific to the female sexual offender. Terry (2006) states that once the role of reporting increases, it will be less difficult to conduct comprehensive studies on female sexual offenders, and thus it will also be less difficult to establish a comprehensive understanding of these offenders' characteristics. It is important to bear in mind that the characteristics discussed below are based on international studies only.

#### **Demographics**

According to Vandiver (2006), a typical female sexual offender is a Caucasian in her 20s or 30s – the average age of a female sexual offender is 26 years old.

#### **Mental Status of the Female Sexual Offender**

Studies, such as that of Warren and Hislop (2001), suggest that there is a higher rate of mental illness (such as the presence of psychotic disorder, schizophrenia, or depressive symptoms) amongst female sexual offenders than male sexual offenders. Other disorders may include eating disorders (Warren & Hislop, 2001). Female sexual offenders usually have a higher incidence of self-mutilation with suicidal ideation (Kaplan & Green, 1995). Kaplan and Green (1995) conducted a study on female sexual offenders and found that many of these offenders have post-traumatic syndrome and experience major depression.

Although these studies may indicate that there are high percentages of mental illnesses amongst female sexual offenders, it is also important to consider that most of these samples were obtained from clinical sources. Therefore, it is likely that these

samples will have a higher rate of mental illness. Furthermore, studies have found that female sexual offenders are more likely to have been sexually abused or victimised by a family member (such as a father) or by someone they know (Mathews, Matthews, & Speltz, 1991; Miccio-Fonseca, 2000; Terry, 2006).

In a study conducted by Crawford (2010), it was found that sexual abuse committed by females was considered to be an emotional process which stemmed from fear, coercion, loneliness, and the perception that they need to please their partners. These females may cope with the abuse through avoidance, denial, deception, and substance abuse (Warren & Hislop, 2001).

Mathews et al. (1991) demonstrate that females who sexually abuse children usually suffer from a personality disorder. Mathews et al. (1991) also show that such females show signs of low self-esteem, feelings of insecurity, dependency, and shame. Both Chow and Choy's (2002) and Vandiver's (2006) study found avoidant personality, dependent personality, antisocial personality as well as borderline personality tendencies with or without psychotic features to be present in female sexual abusers. Some case studies also suggest that these offenders usually have drug dependencies and that they present with depression, suicidal ideation, cognitive impairment, and poor coping skills (Mathews et al., 1991; Warren & Hislop, 2001). These personality traits could be seen to predispose a female to committing sexual abuse (Chow & Choy, 2002; Vandiver, 2006).

### **Types of Sexual Abuse Committed by Females**

Vandiver's (2006) research indicates that female sexual abuse covers a wide range of behaviour. Vandiver (2006) makes a distinction between abusive behaviour that includes hands-off offences and abuse that includes hands-on behaviour. Hands-off behaviour includes watching the victims bathing, dressing and undressing,

using the bathroom, masturbating as well as watching a victim having sexual intercourse with another person (Vandiver, 2006). Victims of hands-off abusive behaviour are also forced to watch the perpetrators dress and undress, masturbate, have sexual intercourse with their partner, and change feminine hygiene products in the presence of the victim (Vandiver, 2006).

Hands-on sexual abuse committed by female sexual offenders includes a broad range of behaviour. This behaviour includes physical fondling, oral stimulation, inserting fingers into an orifice of the body, forcing another to watch others engaging in sexual intercourse and activities, forcing another to touch or fondle the perpetrator as well as inserting objects into any orifices of the body (Vandiver, 2006). Such objects include enema equipment, sticks, candles, vibrators, scissors, knives, hair rollers, needles, religious symbols, and vacuum cleaner parts (Vandiver, 2006). One case even included the insertion of a gold fish into an orifice (Vandiver, 2006). Other sexual activity may include lying on top of or under the perpetrator (Vandiver, 2006). These factors may have an impact on the victim chosen (such as the gender of the victim) and the type of female sexual offender (Vandiver, 2006).

### **Victims of the Female Sexual Offender**

According to Vandiver (2006), the most common characteristic of female sexual offenders is that the victims are either known to her, or they are related to her (such as a mother abusing her own children). Warren and Hislop (2001) found that the victims of such abuse are generally younger than 12 years old. According to section 57 of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) children under the age of 12 years old are unable to give consent to participate in any sexual acts. Therefore, female sexual offenders usually fall under the criteria of the paedophilia disorder as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition



(DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These criteria include the sexual arousal of a physically mature person regarding prepubescent or early pubescent children (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This refers to a child that is generally 13 years old or younger. Such arousal includes fantasies, urges, or behaviours for a period of six months or more (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to the DSM-5(American Psychiatric Association, 2013) the prevalence of females with a paedophilic disorder remains unknown.

The sex of female sexual abuse victims varies; however, some researchers, such as Rudin, Zalewski, and Bodmer-Turner (1995) and Vandiver (2006), found that there were a slightly higher number of female victims than the number of male victims. However, Vandiver (2006) further notes that the sex of the victim may vary depending on whether the female sexual offender acted alone or if she had a co-offender. Offenders acting alone are more likely to have male victims, whereas those acting with a male co-offender are more likely to have a combination of both male and female victims (Vandiver, 2006). From these results, it can be deduced that female sexual offending more often occurs with a male co-offender (Mathews et al., 1991).

### **Comparing Female and Male Sexual Offenders' Characteristics**

This section has been included to demonstrate that, although there are similarities between male and female sexual offenders, female sexual offenders remain a unique group that should be studied as such to gain further insight into this phenomenon. Giguere and Bumby (2007) and Vandiver (2006) state that there are several similarities and differences that exist between female sexual offenders and male sexual offenders.

According to Mathews et al. (1991) and Miccio-Fonseca (2000), both male and female sexual offenders usually have poor coping skills, relationship difficulties, cognitive distortions, and victim empathy deficits. However, it is unclear what kind of relationship difficulties exist and which predisposing and precipitating factors are involved. Researchers, such as Mathews et al. (1991) and Miccio-Fonseca (2000), have found that adolescent male and female sexual offenders often have co-occurring delinquency, low self-esteem, and substance abuse problems. In addition to these factors, family difficulties are prominent in both groups of offenders (Mathew et al., 1991; Miccio-Fonseca, 2000). Giguere and Bumby (2007) and Rudin et al. (1995) found that, contrary to popular belief, female sexual offences do not differ in severity in comparison to male sexual offences. Both male and female sexual offenders tend to deny, minimise, and justify their abusive behaviour (Terry, 2006).

Vandiver (2006) suggests that both groups of offenders indicate similar reasons for entering therapy, such as anxiety, depression, and relationship difficulties. However, Vandiver (2006) does not mention if the therapy is undertaken before or after the commission of a sexual offence. In a study conducted by Gannon, Hoare, Rose, and Parrat (2008) on female sexual offenders, it was found that females, like males, tend to minimise the psychological harm inflicted on the victims they abuse. These findings are similar to the findings of Terry's (2006) study. Female sexual offenders deny, minimise, and justify the sexual abuse, which was also found to be the case where the female offender had a male co-offender (Gannon et al., 2008). The female sexual offenders tendency to deny, minimise and to justify the sexual abuse are important factors to note as it may play a significant role in the treatment strategies used regarding female sexual offenders.

In contrast to male sexual offenders, female sexual offenders usually report a higher incidence of sexual victimisation in their life histories (Miccio-Fonseca, 2000). According to Miccio-Fonseca (2000), sexual abuse suffered during childhood is an important variable in predicting future sexual abuse perpetration in females. Such sexual victimisation is usually extensive, severe, and often incestuous in nature (Miccio-Fonseca, 2000). Female sexual offenders are more likely than male sexual offenders to have been victims of rape in the past (Giguere & Bumby, 2007; Vandiver, 2006).

Adult females, in comparison to adult males, are more likely to commit a sexual offence with a co-offending male perpetrator (Grayson, 1989). However, it was found in a South African study conducted by Wood, Welman, and Netto (2000) that sexual offences committed by males were usually carried out with a co-offender. This study does not mention whether the co-offender was male or female. This phenomenon may either occur with a male or female accomplice, or as a result of male or female coercion (Wood et al., 2000). Females who sexually offend are also more likely to commit these sexual acts in the context of a care-giving relationship, and they are less likely than males to commit sexual offences against strangers (Giguere & Bumby, 2007; Grayson, 1989; Vandiver, 2006). Grayson (1989) states that females seem to be less likely than males to use violence, and females are also less likely than males to have a wide range of deviant sexual behaviour.

Female sexual offenders are also less likely to have legal problems or contact with the legal system prior to being charged for a sexual offence (Giguere & Bumby, 2007; Vandiver, 2006). Therefore, a sexual offence is more likely to be the first arrest for a female (Giguere & Bumby, 2007; Vandiver, 2006). However, this was not found to be the case with male sexual offenders (Giguere & Bumby, 2007; Vandiver, 2006).

It is my perception that professional bias and previous laws that made sexual offences applicable to males only should, however, be kept in mind when considering whether a female has a previous record of sexual offences.

According to Miccio-Fonseca (2000) and Terry (2006), female sexual offenders are slightly younger than male sexual offenders at the time of their first arrest. The act of rape is usually less common amongst female sexual offenders than male sexual offenders, and the victims of female sexual offenders tend to be of the same gender (Harris, 2010; Mathews et al., 1991). Giguere and Bumby (2007) state that female sexual offenders who have committed acts of rape are more likely to choose victims of the same gender, unlike males who usually choose female victims when they commit rapes.

Giguere and Bumby (2007) indicate that when child victims are the targets, female sexual offenders are more likely to target both genders, whereas males are more likely to target children of the opposite sex. Victims of female sexual offenders are more likely to be young children in comparison to male sexual offenders (Giguere & Bumby, 2007). It has also been indicated that female sexual offenders are likely to have fewer sexual partners than male sexual offenders (Giguere & Bumby, 2007).

Miccio-Fonseca (2000) found that female sexual offenders are more likely to have sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and they are also more likely to become sexually active at a younger age than male sexual offenders. This study indicated that female sexual offenders have poor sexual health and poor habits in general that should be considered when implementing a treatment programme for them (Miccio-Fonseca, 2000).

The similarities and differences between male and female sexual offenders have important implications for the development of policies, treatment programmes,

and intervention plans for both the victims and the perpetrators. Although some similarities have been found amongst the sexual offender population, the empirical research indicates that female sexual offenders are a heterogeneous group of offenders (Terry, 2006). It is important to explore this group of offenders through scientific research in order to elaborate on existing literature regarding the differences between male and female sexual offenders. Such an exploration would also assist in making decisions regarding these offenders. Furthermore, it would also assist in understanding the phenomenon from a clinical psychology perspective.

### **Typologies of Female Sexual Offenders**

These typologies are based on the characteristics of offenders, offence characteristics, and victim types (Harris, 2010). According to Gannon et al. (2008), typologies can be used to explain the cause of offending and the processes associated with offending. These typologies serve as a valuable tool for professionals to understand sexual offenders. Such typologies could also provide assistance to professionals who undertake treatment interventions with such offenders. There are several typologies that have been developed to describe female sexual offending such as those developed by Mathews et al. (1991), Sarrel and Masters (1982), Wolfe (1985, cited in Vandiver, 2006), Mayer (1992) and Syed and Williams (1996).

Gannon et al. (2008) found that three stable patterns exist regarding female sexual offending, namely explicit approach offenders (those that plan the offence), directed avoidance offenders (those that are directed by a male accomplice), and implicit-disorganised offenders (those that do not intend to offend and hence engage in minimal planning).

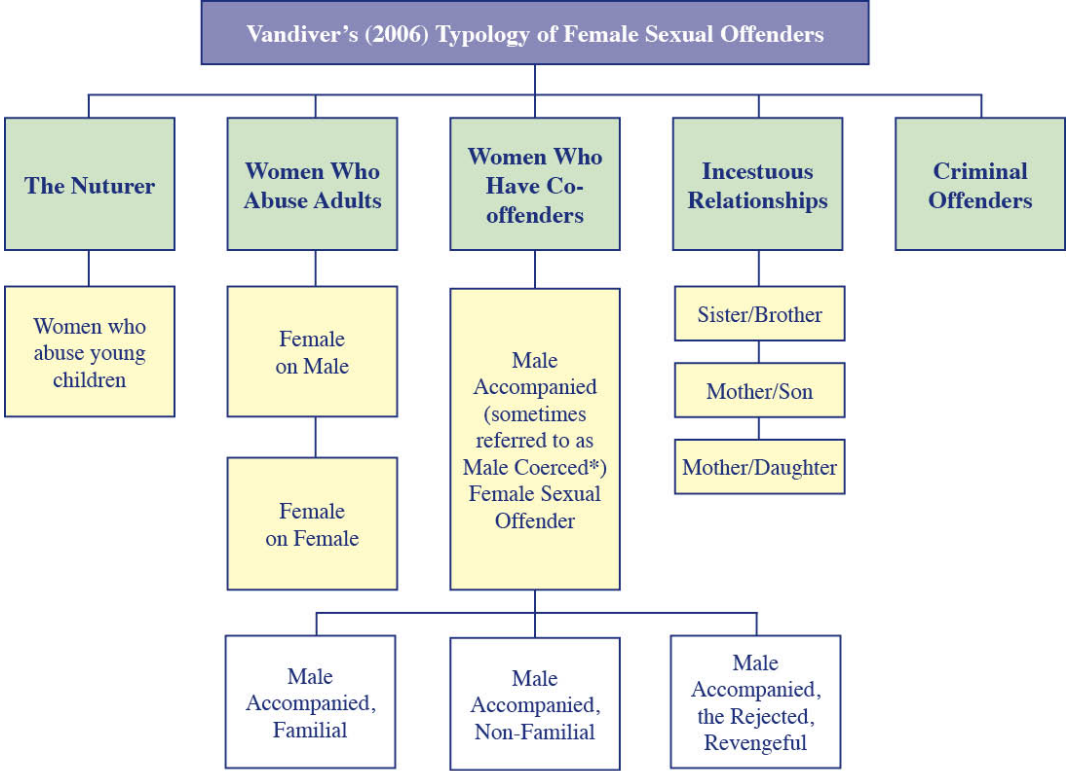
According to Warren and Hislop (2001), extensive typologies have been developed for male sexual offenders. These typologies are based on sophisticated

analysis and have been subjected to repeated tests. However, the development of typologies on female sexual offenders is still in its early stages (Vandiver, 2006). Much of the research on female sexual offenders is based on fairly small samples, which makes it difficult to generalise beyond these samples (Terry, 2006). A further complication is that most of the research focuses on clinical samples (Terry, 2006). These factors create the inaccurate perception that most female sexual offenders suffer from severe psychological disorders.

Other research has used samples from prisons, which means that only the most serious cases of sexual offences detected by the criminal justice system were included in the research (Terry, 2006). These factors create an inaccurate perception of the phenomenon of female sexual offending. Females are thus seen as only committing the most serious sexual offences. My opinion is that focusing only on prison samples results in ignoring a major portion of sexual offenders – those that do not serve prison time. Similarly, if the focus of research is on a clinical sample only, it may give a skewed perception of the prevalence of mental illness amongst female sexual offenders.

In this study, I make use of Vandiver's (2006) typology because of its broad and understandable categories. I further expand on the subcategory of 'Woman who have co-offenders' using Harris' (2010) category of male-coerced female sexual offenders. I have done this as I believe Harris' (2010) category adds to Vandiver's (2006) typology. This typology and the subcategories are depicted in Figure 2.1 on the following page by using a flow chart to make them more understandable to the reader. This typology has been used as a way to describe and understand the female sexual offender. This typology has also been used to focus on differences and similarities between the various groups and to gain a theoretical understanding of the

phenomenon. It should also be noted that, at times, there is no clear distinction between these categories, which means that a female sexual offender could be described using two or more of the suggested categories of female sexual offending.



\*Harris (2010)

Figure 2.1. The typology of the female sexual offender (adapted from Vandiver, 2006).

In order to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of female sexual offending by using this typology, I have also included Harris’ (2010) category of the male-coerced female sexual offender.

**The Nurturer**

This group is also referred to as the “women who abuse adolescent boys”, “heterosexual nurturers”, “adolescent abusers” or “criminally limited paedophiles”, “the teacher/lover”, “babysitter abuse”, or “the seducer/lover” (Harris, 2010, p.120).

Vandiver (2006) explains that these offences usually involve sexual abuse in an inappropriate relationship between a female and someone that she knows. In these relationships, the female is in a position of authority. These females often abuse adolescent boys and usually commit sexual offences with unrelated male adolescents (Harris, 2010; Warren & Hislop, 2001). Mathews et al. (1991) and Nelson (2003) suggest that this group mainly consists of teachers or babysitters involved with adolescents.

These offenders believe that they are elevating the adolescent boy to adult status and that they are not committing an offence (Harris, 2010). They also believe that the boy is a willing participant in a consensual relationship (Harris, 2010). Vandiver (2006) suggests that this type of sexual offender is not predatory and does not attempt to procure young children from certain locations such as parks and school.

The initial sexual encounter is often not premeditated; however, other encounters may be carefully planned and calculated (Harris, 2010). Vandiver (2006) suggests that there seems to be a grooming process where the female gradually becomes a friend of the adolescent. This group is less likely to have been sexually abused themselves as children (Vandiver, 2006). However, they may have been emotionally and verbally abused during childhood (Harris, 2010). These types of offenders may also have had a distant or absent father (Harris, 2010).

Mathews et al. (1991) further explain the relationship between the female sexual offender and the adolescent. When the female sexual offender turns to an adolescent male, it is the result of feeling fearful towards men (Mathews et al., 1991). These females often refer to the relationship as a love affair and minimise or deny the adolescent status of the male (Mathews et al., 1991). According to Warren and Hislop



(2001), the adolescent often does not reciprocate the feelings of intimacy as expressed by the female, and many even describe the relationship as sadistic.

One of the most highly publicised cases of such a female sexual offender was that of a teacher, Mary Kay LeTourneau, in Seattle, USA. She had a sexual relationship with her sixth grade student and was sentenced to six months imprisonment for the offence (Vandiver, 2006). After she was released from prison, she continued to have a relationship with her former student and was again arrested for this relationship (Vandiver, 2006). After this arrest, she again continued the relationship with the student, and she has since had two children with him (Vandiver, 2006). Once he turned 21 years old, the couple married (Vandiver, 2006). According to Vandiver (2006), despite the wide coverage of this case, the public did not necessarily equate this form of interaction with a sexual offence. Despite the misconception regarding this category of female sexual offending, Vandiver (2006) has found that the effects of this type of sexual abuse are both long-term and profound.

**Women who abuse young children.** This group targets younger, prepubescent children in comparison to the previous group (Vandiver, 2006). They are considered to constitute a smaller group of the total number of female sexual offenders. According to Harris (2010) and Mathews et al. (1991), they are often referred to as ‘predisposed’ offenders (p. 18). These offenders tend to act alone and may abuse their own children in an effort to gain a non-threatening form of emotional intimacy (Harris, 2010; Mathews et al., 1991). According to Mathews et al. (1991), these offenders have usually been sexually abused during their childhood, or they have experienced other forms of severe childhood trauma.

Their adult relationships may be unhealthy, and they may suffer from emotional and psychological difficulties, such as low self-esteem, extreme anger, or distorted thinking (Mathew et al., 1991). Harris (2010) describes these offenders as having deviant fantasies about sexual offending. Harris (2010) also suggests that these offenders may use violence during the commission of an offence. These females are described as aggressive, impulsive, poorly socialised, and depressed (Harris, 2010). They may also suffer from mental illness (Harris, 2010). Warren and Hislop (2001) refer to this subgroup as “the psychotic group” (p.5) of female sexual offenders, and they mention that these offenders may, during their mental illness, inappropriately initiate sexual encounters (often with their own children).

An example of such a sexual encounter is the case of a female who was suffering from psychosis (Warren & Hislop, 2001). She falsely believed that her eight year old daughter was seducing her boyfriend (Warren & Hislop, 2001). The female also believed that her daughter was possessed by demons and that her daughter was the cause of the grandparents’ death (Warren & Hislop, 2001). According to Warren and Hislop (2001), these paranoid delusions led the female to insert a knife into the girl’s vagina and then to hit the knife forcibly with a hammer. I hypothesise that this form of sexual abuse occurs as a result of the psychotic process of paranoid delusions. Thus this group of sexual offenders is different from the group of female offenders who want to gain a form of emotional intimacy from their children.

### **Women Who Abuse Adults**

Females who abuse adults do not always come to the attention of authorities because of various socio-cultural factors and victim concerns (such as guilt, blame, and uncertainty of when an offence has been committed) (Harris, 2010). This group is

further divided into two groups, namely female-on-male and female-on-female (Vandiver, 2006). These two groups are discussed below.

**Female-on-male.** This subcategory is also referred to by theorists as female sexual harassment, the female rapist group, dominant women, forced assault group, or angry-impulsive (Mayer, 1992; Sarrel & Masters, 1982; Syed & Williams, 1996). This group is known to be angry or impulsive as they are usually motivated by anger (Vandiver, 2006). Their behaviour could be seen as being on a scale that may include sexual harassment and female rape (Vandiver, 2006). According to Vandiver (2006), in these cases, force or threatened force occurs. The males are usually physically constrained in some way and are fearful of the attacker, although they are able to function sexually during the attack (Vandiver, 2006). It has been found that the victims are unable to function sexually after the attack, and they usually suffer relationship difficulties as a result of the sexual attack (Vandiver, 2006).

**Female-on-female.** This group is also referred to as homosexual criminals or aggressive homosexual offenders because their victims are usually female (Vandiver, 2006). According to Harris (2010), this form of sexual offending includes forcing females into prostitution. However, Vandiver (2006) further suggests that this category is a unique category and may include acts of domestic violence between females in homosexual relationships. Furthermore, Vandiver (2006) also suggests that these offenders and victims are typically in their 30s. It is believed that these female sexual offenders' motivations are likely to be similar to those of male sexual offenders who sexually assault their partners (Vandiver, 2006).

### **Women Who Have Co-Offenders**

Women who have co-offenders comprise the largest portion of female sexual offenders (Harris, 2010; Vandiver, 2006). Giguere and Bumby (2007) state that, until

recently, little has been known about the differences between females who act alone and females who have co-offenders. According to Giguere and Bumby (2007) and Vandiver (2006), co-offending females are more likely to have multiple young victims, to victimise females or both males and females, to target family members (such as their own children), and to have been charged with a non-sexual offence at the time of the sexual offence charge. Vandiver (2006) also mentions that these females have a broad range of activities ranging from passive participation to more active participation.

The characteristics of females who have a co-offender may vary with regard to their relationship to the victim and to the co-offender, their motivation, whether they were indeed coerced, and the level of contact with their victims during the abuse (Giguere & Bumby, 2007; Vandiver & Walker, 2002). Vandiver (2006) suggests that researchers have relied on the relationship between a woman and her victim, as well as her motivation for the abuse, when developing classifications of co-offending. The co-offender category is further divided into the sub-category of male accompanied female sexual offender. This includes male-accompanied familial and male-accompanied non-familial, as well as male-accompanied rejected/revengeful (Vandiver, 2006). Harris (2010) suggests that a further distinction should be made between the male-coerced offender and the male-accompanied offender. Vandiver (2006) categories of male-accompanied familial and male-accompanied non-familial, as well as male-accompanied rejected/revengeful as well as Harris (2010) distinction between the male-coerced offender and the male-accompanied offender are discussed below.

**The male-accompanied offender.** According to Harris (2010), the male-accompanied offender is believed to be more active in the abuse and, over time,

may come to initiate the sexual abuse independently. These females may also be more prone towards general criminality; however, it is unknown whether these offences are committed in the company of a male co-perpetrator (Harris, 2010). Mathews et al. (1991) states that these offenders initially abuse in conjunction with a male, but may later abuse independently.

These offenders are described as excessively dependent and non-assertive (Warren & Hislop, 2001). I hypothesise that these female offenders, although non-assertive and dependent, may replace their dependence on a dominant male figure with the sexual abuse perpetrated against a victim. Consequently, this dependency displacement may result in these offenders later abusing independently.

This group of sexual offenders is usually involved in a triad in which the female does not act alone in the abuse (Warren & Hislop, 2001). Typically, the triad includes the mother, father, and a victim (usually their own child, stepchild, or an unrelated child) (Warren & Hislop, 2001). According to Vandiver (2006), either the mother or the father is the coercer. Vandiver (2006) speculates that the mother may initially be the initiator as she may feel dependent, or she may wish to nurture her own child. She may also be re-enacting the sexual abuse that she was exposed to during her own childhood (Warren & Hislop, 2001; Travin et al., 1990). When the father is the initiator, it may become apparent that the mother is coerced (Warren & Hislop, 2001). The category of the male-accompanied offender is divided into three categories, namely male-accompanied familial, male-accompanied non-familial, and male-accompanied rejected/vengeful. These are discussed below.

***Male-accompanied familial.*** Syed and Williams (1996) found that, instead of relying on Mathew et al.'s (1991) category of the male-coerced female sexual offender, it is more appropriate to create a new category, namely the

male-accompanied familial offender. This category seems to include cases in which a female was coerced into committing a sexual offence as well as cases in which it is uncertain whether the female was coerced by or if she just accompanied the dominant male (Mathew et al., 1991). According to Vandiver (2006), the male-accompanied familial category usually consists of co-offending mothers who abuse their own child or children.

***Male-accompanied non-familial.*** This category includes situations where a female is usually coerced by a dominant male (Vandiver, 2006). According to Mathews et al. (1991), it has been found that these females are usually highly vulnerable to coercion in cases of sexual abuse.

***Male-accompanied rejected/revengeful.*** According to Terry (2006), this category was introduced by Nathan and Ward (2002) who proposed that male partners did not necessarily coerce the females. Instead, these females may abuse others out of revenge or rejection (Terry, 2006). Vandiver (2006) states that these case studies indicate that this group of female sexual offenders is motivated by feelings of rejection present in significant relationships, and they may therefore commit the sexual offences out of revenge. In one study, Vandiver (2006) found that females who were continuously victims of chronic domestic violence reported committing the sexual offences out of extreme jealousy.

### **Incestuous Relationships**

This category includes relationships in which females have committed sexual abuse in their capacity as a relative, mother, or older sister (Vandiver, 2006). In these cases, the female generally acts alone in abusing her daughter, son, niece, or nephew (Vandiver, 2006). It appears that sexual abuse is usually prevalent in this type of offender's family of origin (Frey, 2010; Vandiver, 2006). This group is further

divided into the following subgroups: sister-brother incest, mother-son incest, and mother-daughter incest (Frey, 2010; Vandiver, 2006).

### **Criminal Offenders**

This category includes females who have a history of non-sexual arrests or convictions in conjunction with an arrest for sexual offences (Vandiver, 2006).

Gannon et al. (2008) mention that categories such as the female sexual predator and the homosexual criminal can also be included in this category. According to Vandiver (2006), the female sexual predator usually has male victims, whereas the homosexual criminal usually has female victims. Females that qualify for the homosexual criminal category are usually arrested for forceful behaviour such as performing sexual behaviour with a child and compelling others to participate in prostitution (Vandiver, 2006).

Other types of behaviour that may fall into this category may include having children posing nude for photographs (Vandiver, 2006). These photographs are usually sold privately or made available on websites for economic benefit (Vandiver, 2006). The offences committed in this category are usually 'hands-off' behaviours (Vandiver, 2006). The offenders usually have another criminal record, and they primarily commit the sexual abuse for the purpose of generating an income (Vandiver, 2006). Therefore, the motivation is primarily economic rather than sexual. According to Vandiver (2006), these women usually act with a consenting male and may also be part of a 'sex ring'. Therefore, this category may overlap with the category of co-offenders.

### **Theories on Female Sexual Offending**

The typology of female sexual offenders given above provides a description of females who sexually abuse others. Giguere and Bumby (2007), Travin et al. (1990),

and Vandiver (2006) found that sexual gratification was not the sole motivating factor for this type of offending, which indicates that additional theories should be used to explain female sexual offences. According to Ward and Hudson (1998), male sexual offending can be divided into three levels based on the level of abstraction that provides a theoretical explanation for male sexual offending.

Harris (2010) applies these levels of male sexual offending to female sexual offending. Although Harris (2010) warns against applying male sexual offender theories directly to female sexual offenders, it appears as though Harris (2010) has made use of some of the aspects of these male theories as well as feminist theories to explain the multi-factor theories.

The levels identified are Level I, II, and III (Harris, 2010). Level I theories, also known as the multi-factor theories, provide a comprehensive account of female sexual offending (Harris, 2010). Level II theories provide and explain a single factor that may be considered particularly important for female sexual offending (Harris, 2010). This level could be seen as providing a more in-depth explanation of any variable found in Level I. Level III theories or the micro-level theories are considered to be much less common as they provide a descriptive model of the offence process (Harris, 2010). These models are usually developed inductively from narratives and outlines of cognitive, affective, and contextual variables related to the commission of a sexual offence (Gannon et al., 2008; Harris, 2010). In the following section, these levels are discussed.

### **Level I: Multi-Factor Theories**

This theory level focuses on powerlessness, which is a potential perspective of female sexual offending borrowed from feminist criminology (Harris, 2010).

According to Harris (2010), two pathways that may explain female sexual offending



are patriarchy and powerless, and the construction of victimisation. These pathways have been used to describe female offending in general (Harris, 2010). According to Harris (2010), the concept of powerlessness as a pathway of patriarchy could be used to explain the broader context of structural power. For example, it is the female's traditional responsibility to raise a family. Some females may find the responsibility of raising a child to be all-consuming, isolating, and physically and emotionally draining. These effects of raising a child may be increased by the absence of a supportive partner.

According to Harris (2010), a female's powerlessness in the public sphere has the possibility of becoming reversed in the private sphere with regard to the family; hence it is possible that a female may feel powerless in her own private life. This reversal could occur when the abuse, neglect, or even over-discipline of a child becomes an opportunity for the female to feel that she has control and power (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). Thus, the abuse could be seen as a way for the female to acquire a sense of control and power in an otherwise powerless existence (Harris, 2010).

Harris (2010) further explains that the second pathway, namely victimisation, could come from childhood sexual abuse. Victimisation could result from feeling that one has little control over one's sexuality (or actually having little control over one's sexuality) (Harris, 2010). In general, women who have been sexually abused during childhood are at a greater risk of developing substance abuse problems and being involved in theft or shoplifting, prostitution, or other sexually related offences (Chow & Choy, 2002). This deviant behaviour could be seen as a coping strategy (Harris, 2010).

Terry (2006) explains that victims of incest often become offenders in order to resolve their unresolved sexual trauma. This phenomenon could be seen as a role

reversal where the women have the opportunity to recapitulate their sexual abuse experiences by being in the dominant position (Terry, 2006). However, it should also be mentioned that not all female sexual offenders are abused as children and that not all females who have been abused as children become sexual offenders.

## **Level II: Single-Factor Theories**

Single-factor theories focus on specific factors that may explain female sexual offending (Harris, 2010). These factors may include individual vulnerability factors that may explain female sexual offending, including childhood victimisation, coercion by a male co-perpetrator, and cognitive distortions (Harris, 2010). These factors are discussed below.

**Childhood victimisation.** According to Davis (2006), many female sexual offenders report dysfunctional family backgrounds characterised by neglect and abuse such as sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. The severity and frequency of the abuse also appear to play a role (Davis, 2006). Childhood victimisation of female sexual offenders plays an important predictive factor in being vulnerable to becoming an offender (Davis, 2006). According to Harris (2010) and Warren and Hislop (2001), this influence is particularly true for female sexual offenders who choose young victims.

According to Warren and Hislop (2001), many female sexual offenders who have been previously abused will use the same methods of targeting, grooming, or silencing their victims as their own abusers did. Hislop (1999, cited in Warren & Hislop, 2001) mentions that when sexual abuse is found in a female sexual offender's childhood, it is usually severe. The average age of offenders when the abuse begins is approximately 7, 5 years old, and the abuse usually takes place over a seven year period (Warren & Hislop, 2001).

**Coercion by a co-offender.** Mathew et al. (1991) specify that male-coerced female offenders usually commit sexual offences in the presence of their male coercers. The female is considered to act out of fear of physical punishment or sexual assault in these cases (Mathew et. al., 1991). These offenders may also commit acts because of extreme emotional dependency on their partners and because of a fear of abandonment (Cortoni, 2010; Giguere & Bumby, 2007; Harris, 2010). However, it is my opinion that this category does not make allowances for cases in which an offender does not commit sexual abuse after their relationship with their male co-perpetrator has been terminated.

The male-coerced female offender often subscribes to traditional gender roles that encourage male dominance over females within the relationship context as well as in society (Mathews et al., 1991). According to Harris (2010), these females may participate directly in the abuse, or they may serve as a facilitator to procure or to coerce additional victims into sexual activity. The victims are most likely to be the female's daughter, son, or even unrelated children (Harris, 2010). I believe that the presence or absence of a co-offender has very important implications for understanding offences. This is because the presence or absence of a co-offender could also serve to guide interventions, treatment, and management decisions.

In a study conducted by Johansson-Love (2007), it was found that being a co-perpetrator during a crime versus being a passive participant during the commission of a crime is mainly related to being female.

**Cognitive distortions.** Another theory that may explain female sexual offending could be that of cognitive distortions (Ford, 2010). Cognitive distortions are frequently reported in the literature regarding male sexual offenders. However, there are a number of defence mechanisms that are reported by women that are similar to

those of male sexual offenders (Harris, 2010). According to Ford (2010) and Harris (2010), cognitive distortions in female sexual offenders may include the following:

- Children as sexual objects: This occurs when the female sexual offender perceives the child to be sexually seductive or sexually excited.
- Nature of harm: The female sexual offender may not believe that the sexual abuse harms the child or adult.
- Uncontrollability: This is the general view that things ‘just happen’ and that it is not in one’s control.
- Dangerous world: This is the perception that the world is generally dangerous and that it is safer to engage with children than with adults.
- Entitlement: This is the perception that certain people are superior to others and require their needs to be met.

In the case of a male-coerced female sexual offender, female sexual offenders may hold the cognitive distortion that their male coercer is entitled to control them and to engage in sexual relationships with children (Harris, 2010). Sykes and Matza (1957, cited in Harris, 2010) suggest five techniques of neutralisation that can occur regarding a male-coerced female sexual offender. These techniques are denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, appeal to a higher loyalty, and condemnation of the condemners (Harris, 2010). These cognitive distortions act as mechanisms in which the female sexual offenders deny their specific role in an offence to minimise the injury to the victims and to justify or excuse their behaviour (Harris, 2010). They most often achieve this denial by externalising and shifting the blame onto other individuals or circumstances (Harris, 2010).

### **Level III: Micro-Level Theories**

Level III theories involve micro-level theories developed from actual offence accounts (Harris, 2010). These theories seek to explore how female sexual offences occur, but not necessarily why they occur (Harris, 2010). Thus, the model is based on the grounded theory and includes three phases, namely background factors, the pre-offence period, and the offence period (Harris, 2010). These are discussed below.

**Phase one: Background factors.** These factors predispose females to commit sexual offences and include factors such as the early family environment, abusive experiences, lifestyle outcomes, vulnerability factors, and major life stressors (Harris, 2010; Terry, 2006; Warren & Hislop, 2001). These factors are discussed individually below.

***Early family environment.*** The early family environment may include either negative experiences within the female sexual offender's background, such as over- or under-attachment with a caregiver, negative parenting styles, and a lack of family cohesion (Mathew et al., 1991). In families where parental neglect or rejection exists, or if one or both parents are absent, these factors may predispose females to commit sexual offences (Mathew et al., 1991).

***Abusive experiences.*** Abusive experiences describe either actual or vicarious abuse such as sexual, physical, or emotional abuse (Johansson-Love, 2007). This abuse could include witnessing domestic violence, being punished physically, being sexually assaulted, being bullied at school, and being a victim of crime (Johansson-Love, 2007). According to Harris (2010), these experiences may have an effect on individuals if the experiences occurred during childhood and extended into adolescence or early adulthood. Warren and Hislop (2001) mention that the family in which the sexual abuse takes place tends to exhibit certain interactional patterns that

do not allow the female to grow and to differentiate from the family of origin, and thus the female child does not know how to form healthy relationships.

***Lifestyle outcomes.*** Lifestyle outcomes refer to adaptive or maladaptive behaviour which may manifest as a result of certain experiences during childhood and adolescence (Harris, 2010; Kaplan & Green, 1995). Maladaptive behaviour may include erratic or unstable behaviours such as the possession of substances and promiscuous sex (Harris, 2010). Adaptive behaviours may include coping styles, satisfactory employment, and relationships (Harris, 2010; Kaplan & Green, 1995).

***Vulnerability factors.*** These factors are divided into four clusters that may influence a female's likelihood of offending. These clusters include coping styles, social support, personality issues and mental health (Miccio-Fonseca, 2000). I hypothesise that predisposing factors are different from vulnerability factors in that vulnerability factors make a person more vulnerable to developing abnormal behaviour. Whereas, predisposing factors make an individual inclined towards a particular type of behaviour (Miccio-Fonseca, 2000).

***Coping styles.*** Coping styles may refer to the ways in which a female deals with stress (Harris, 2010). Coping styles can include maladaptive coping styles such as substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, and criminal behaviour (Harris, 2010).

***Social support.*** Social support refers to a female's perception of the support offered by her family, friends, and other support structures (Harris, 2010). Such support may include both emotional and physical support (Harris, 2010). Social support may further provide a buffer to prevent females from committing crimes because it provides them with the opportunity to share their problems in an adaptive manner rather than through deviant behaviour (Harris, 2010).

*Personality disorders and other disorders.* These disorders may refer to characteristics such as dependency, aggression, or borderline traits (Johansson-Love, 2007). According to Warren and Hislop (2001), personality disorders amongst female sexual offenders, in many cases, exert a greater influence on the sexual abuse than the role of deviant sexual arousal. Warren and Hislop (2001) state that these personality disorders are caused by a lack of childhood development regarding the formation of appropriate interpersonal boundaries. According to Kaplan and Green (1995), the most common diagnoses are avoidant personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, anti-social personality disorder, and passive-aggressive personality disorder.

Such personality disorders may be amplified by the co-morbidity of sexual disorders, such as paedophilia (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Paedophilia disorder can be described as a process that occurs over a period of at least six months where there is an equal or greater sexual arousal of an adult relating to prepubescent or early pubescent children, who is generally 13 years old or younger (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). For an individual to be diagnosed with this disorder, they have to act on these sexual urges (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). However, if the person does not act on the sexual urges and fantasies, these urges and fantasies have to cause marked distress or interpersonal difficulty (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Individuals suffering from the disorder should be at least 18 years of age, and they should also be at least five years older than the child or children targeted (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) also includes specifiers, namely “exclusive type (attracted only to children)”, “nonexclusive type”, “sexually attracted to males”, “sexually attracted to females” and “sexually attracted to both” or the paedophilia is “limited to incest” (pp. 697-698). According to DSM-5 (American

Psychiatric Association, 2013), the criterion for paedophilias does not include an individual in late adolescence involved in an on going sexual relationship with a 12 or 13 year old. According to Gerard Labuschagne (electronic/personal communication, 31 May 2013), it is important to note that it is not about the child's chronological age, but it is more about the perception of the child's age that determines which category the person falls into.

Despite the gender-neutral terminology of paedophilia proposed in the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), many researchers believe that this disorder does not exist in females (Denov, 2001). According to Kramer and Bowman (2011), only a handful of studies have identified or extracted a female paedophile.

Paedophiles generally report attraction to children of a certain age range – some paedophiles prefer males or females, while others prefer both (Kramer & Bowman, 2011). Paedophiles attracted to females usually prefer 8 to 10 year olds, whereas those attracted to males usually prefer slightly older children (Kramer & Bowman, 2011).

Individuals who have paedophilia may act on their urges and fantasies by participating in variety of sexual activities with children. These sexual activities may include undressing the child, exposing his or her genitals, masturbating in the presence of the child, or touching a child inappropriately (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Other individuals may perform fellatio or cunnilingus on the child, or penetrate the child's vagina, mouth, or anus with their fingers, foreign objects, or penis. This may entail using various degrees of force (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). These individuals often tend to rationalise their behaviour by believing that it is for “educational value”, that the child derives “sexual pleasure” from the actions, or that the child is “sexually provocative” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 571).



Due to the ego-syntonic nature of paedophilia, individuals with these fantasies, urges, or behaviour do not necessarily experience significant distress (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Individuals with this disorder “may limit their activities to their own children, stepchildren, or relatives, or they may victimise children outside of the family” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 571). These individuals may threaten children to prevent disclosure and may develop intricate techniques for gaining access to children (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Excluding sexual sadism cases, the individuals may be considerate to a child’s needs in order to gain the child’s love, attention, and loyalty as well as to prevent the child from reporting the sexual abuse (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). This disorder generally begins at adolescence, and the course is generally chronic (American Psychological Association, 2000). Despite the general denial of the existence of female paedophiles, this disorder does correspond to the abusive behaviour committed by females discussed earlier in the chapter.

**Major life stressors.** This category includes life stressors that may have occurred during childhood and that may be found in the context of domestically violent personal relationships (Harris, 2010). An example of a life stressor could be where a female has learned that domestic violence is normal, and thus she may continue relationships which are abusive.

### **Phase Two: Pre-Offence Period**

According to Harris (2010), the pre-offence period explains how the vulnerability factors from phase one are amplified and can eventually turn into risk factors. These risk factors may place females at a higher risk of committing female sexual offences. Such risk factors may become particularly relevant during the months

prior to an incident (Harris, 2010). I am unclear from the explanation proposed by Harris (2010) when this process occurs and the duration of the process.

According to Gannon et al. (2008), during the cycle of the offence, females experience an increase in domestic disturbances, financial difficulties, important responsibilities (such as caring for children or ill members of the family), and tendencies of general criminal activity. Gannon et al. (2008) thus state that there are three main motivations for sexual offending, namely sexual gratification, intimacy, and “something else” (p.46). The “something else” (Gannon et al., 2008, p.46) may refer to financial gain, or it may even refer to vengeance. Sexual gratification and intimacy could be sought from either the co-offender or the victim, or both (Gannon et al., 2008).

According to Gannon et al. (2008), there are three types of planning regarding committing an offence, namely implicit, directed, and explicated planning. Implicit planning entails an unconscious process where a female makes the offending possible (Gannon et al., 2008). Direct planning refers to planning by a male co-offender, and explicit planning refers to the conscious and precise preparation of an offence by a female sexual offender (Gannon et al., 2008). According to Harris (2010), the early stages of planning become crystallised during the explicit stages as time passes. The explicit stage is different from the implicit plan in that near the time of the offence, females who implicitly plan may become disinhibited, and they may then implement parts of their plan impulsively. This phenomenon is referred to as implicit-disorganised (Gannon et al., 2008). Whereas, within the explicit stage the early plans are solidified and hence the female offender’s plan will not change and she will not act impulsively (Gannon et al., 2008).

Females who have been directed by a co-offender continue to be directed by their co-offenders, while females who are explicit planners continue to implement their plan precisely and explicitly (Gannon et al., 2008). This phenomenon is referred to as explicit-precise (Harris, 2010). Harris (2010) states that the pre-offence phase could explain the manner in which cognitive distortions are formed. I further hypothesise that the type of planning used by a female sexual offender may affect the grooming process and may also have an impact on the victim's experience of the sexual abuse.

### **Phase Three: Offence Period**

Phase three describes the approach leading to the offence (Harris, 2010). According to Harris (2010), there are four categories in this phase, namely maternal approach, maternal-avoidant approach, aggressive approach, and operational approach. The maternal approach can be described as the teacher/lover approach (Harris, 2010). The offender is typically non-aggressive, but usually coerces male victims into performing sexual behaviour (Harris, 2010). The offenders typically believe that the victim is mature enough to participate in such activities or that the victims are sexually aroused (Harris, 2010). During the commission of the crime, these offenders may use substances, such as alcohol (Harris, 2010).

Maternal-avoidant approach offenders are usually non-aggressive, but they are coercive and may actively, yet unsuccessfully, attempt to avoid sexual offending (Harris, 2010). However, it appears that these offenders usually do sexually offend despite attempting to resist offending (Harris, 2010). The aggressive approach describes females who use aggression and force (Harris, 2010). They typically offend against adults (Harris, 2010). Their focus during the offence is on humiliation and vengeance, but it is not necessarily on sexual arousal (Harris, 2010). Finally, the

operational approach occurs when there is instrumental motivation where the sexual nature of the specific offence is considered the necessary requirement for the achievement of the particular objective (Harris, 2010). For example, this would be in the case of a person making a pornographic film.

**Victim's response to the offence.** According to Gannon et al. (2008), victims' responses may differ during the commission of a crime. Victims may respond in one of three manners, namely being engaged, submissive, or resistant (Gannon et al., 2008). The engaged response usually occurs when the victims are young and appear to react 'positively' to the abuse (Gannon et al., 2008). Submissive victims tend to interact minimally with the offender and do not react strongly during the abusive event (Harris, 2010). Resistant victims usually express discomfort and may ask the offender to stop (Harris, 2010). As a result, these victims are likely to experience high levels of force (Harris, 2010). However, there is no research to indicate that these victims' response have an impact on the effects of the sexual abuse on the victim.

### **Theories Pertaining to Male-Coerced Female Sexual Offenders**

Male-coerced female sexual offenders appear to form the largest group of female sexual offenders (Mathew et al., 1991). In this section of the chapter, I discuss two theories regarding male-coerced female sexual offenders. These theories are the psychological abuse theory and the coercive control theory. I use these theories as I believe that the psychological abuse and coercive control theory may explain the phenomenon of male-coerced female sexual offending.

Furthermore, it can be hypothesised that the continuous exposure of a female to traumatic experiences in the context of a relationship with a dominate male may contribute to a female becoming more vulnerable to victimisation as well as to committing acts of perpetration such as sexual abuse. This discussion has been

included in an attempt to explain the process of coercion that occurs between the female sexual offender and her male coercer.

### **Psychological Abuse Theory**

Psychological abuse could be seen as a form of domestic violence. Stark (2007) and Tolman, Rosen, and Wood (1999) state that the concept of psychological abuse is a form of mind control in itself. These authors propose that relationships involving covert strategies of psychological coercion used to limit individual freedom should be considered maladaptive (Stark, 2007; Tolman et al., 1999). In addition, the female's psychological wellbeing is compromised because of the physical abuse (Tolman et al., 1999).

Features of psychological abuse may include verbal or physical dominance, isolation, imprisonment (to some degree), guilt induction (to promote self-blame), hope instillation (by contingent expressions of love), fear arousal and maintenance, the escalation of terror, the promotion of powerlessness and helplessness, pathological expressions of jealousy, required secrecy, enforced loyalty, and self-denunciation (Tolman et al., 1999).

Several methods have been used to depict psychological abuse. The most popular of these is Pense and Paymar's (1993, cited in Tolman et al., 1999) typology of the Power and Control Wheel. The process of this kind of behaviour is the manner used by the abuser to keep control over their partner (Tolman et al., 1999). This process is depicted in Figure 2.2. The wheel describes eight forms of psychological abuse, namely coercion, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimisation/blame/denial, misuse of children, abuse of male privilege, and economic abuse (Tolman et al., 1999). According to Stark (2007), all these forms of

psychological abuse increase the male’s control over his partner in addition to physical and sexual assault.

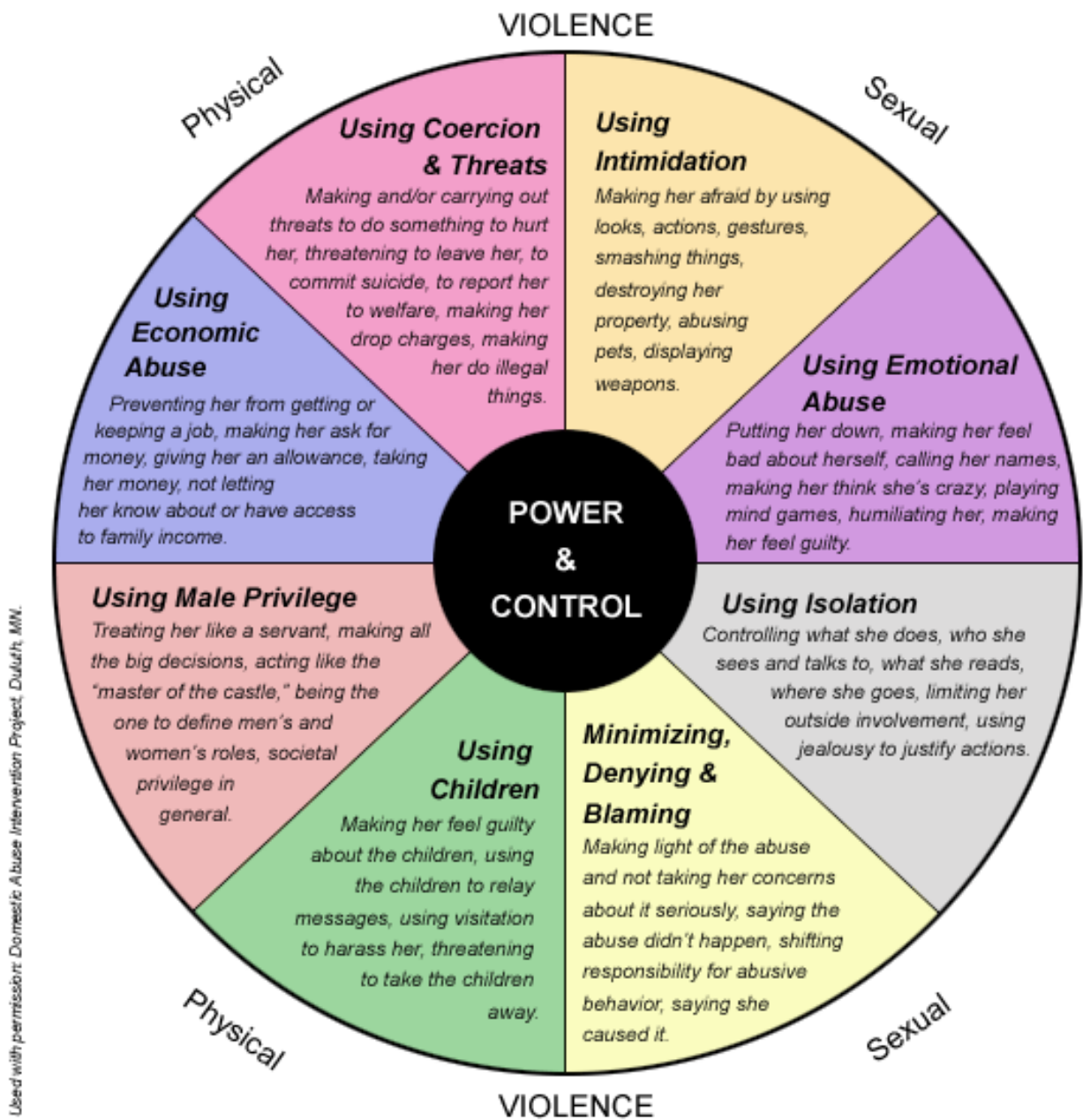


Figure 2.2. The Power and Control Wheel (Institute for Family Violence Studies. 2013, n.p.)

This is a symbolic representation of the relationship of physical and/or sexual violence compared to other forms of violence (Doerner & Lab, 2012). Each section of the wheel demonstrates a tactic that is used to gain control or power (Doerner &

Lab, 2012). The rim that surrounds and supports the various sections is the physical or sexual abuse which holds the system together and which gives the abuser strength (Doerner & Lab, 2012).

According to Stark (2007) and Doerner and Lab (2012), violence within a relationship is always an intentional act that is used to gain control over another person. According to Coker, Smith, McKeown, and King (2000), women who have experienced violence in their family of origin may perceive violence as a normal part of intimate relationships. However, many researchers believe that a female may perceive the relationship with her abuser as a normal part of an intimate relationship (Coker et al., 2000). For example, the female may believe that within a relationship violence is the manner in which her partner shows her that he cares. Few studies have been undertaken to understand how this perception is formed. This problem also further suggests that research needs to be undertaken to determine how power and control could contribute to a situation where an individual commits a crime, such as a sexual offence, under the influence of another person.

Muehlenhard and Kimes (1999) suggest that the danger with only considering physical violence as a model of domestic violence, while ignoring power and control models, is that interventions can be implemented that focus on changing the victim's behaviour to break the cycle of abuse. The effect of this approach is that the intervention is seen as supporting the perpetrator's behaviour, and it would therefore also be seen as controlling the victim's behaviour (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999). In this sense, the victim is seen as being a function of the intervention, which is isomorphic to the relationship between her and her partner as well as the relationship between her and her family of origin (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999).

## **Coercive Control Theory**

Judith Herman (1992, cited in Ludsin & Vetten, 2005) developed the coercive control theory. Originally, the theory was used to explain the behaviour of people in captivity, for example, prisoners of war and political prisoners. According to Ludsin and Vetten (2005), the major difference between prisoners of war and abused women is that abused women are not held captive. These women usually stay in a relationship as they believe that they are in love with their abusive partner. However, Stark (2007) describes this process as that of a woman whose mind has been caged. In contrast to a prisoner confined to a prison cell, the mind of an abused woman is confined to a prison cell (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). It is my understanding that in this way, the woman must obey every command from her abusive partner. Minuchin, Nicholas, and Lee (2007) state that “love is a golden cage ... people don’t realise it is a cage because it is golden ... but is a cage ... you can’t fly away” (p.7). This quotation demonstrates the process of imprisonment as described by Stark (2007).

According to Pistorius (2006) and Stark (2007), research conducted on prisoners of war and abused women and children showed that the self-image, expectations, and behaviour of certain victims might change through systematic manipulation. Such manipulation could be achieved through punishment, reward, and social isolation (Pistorius, 2006). Hazelwood, Warren, and Dietz (1993) mention that one of the most perplexing aspects of women abuse is that the women continue to stay with their abusers despite the continuous abuse. Abused women may make no attempt to escape despite the opportunity to do so (Hazelwood et al., 1993).

Herman’s (1992, cited in Ludsin & Vetten, 2005) theory proposes that the process of coercive control involves destroying any resistance (often brutally) that a woman may show as well as destroying her support mechanisms. This theory suggests



that the power of fear plays a major part in behavioural and psychological changes in abused women (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). It further proposes that the behaviour is twofold in that there must be complete control of the victim and that the victim should appear accepting of her domination (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). When the victim has become submissive and has subsequently been overthrown, the abusive behaviour will be justified. Consequently, the harmful nature will be disguised (Pistorius, 2006). Chapman (2008) states that coercive control is also referred to as brainwashing, mind control, thought control, and thought reform.

Kinscherf (1981, cited in Chapman, 2008) mentions that the motivation behind brainwashing a person is not to force that person into doing something that another person wants them to do, instead it is to make that person believe that they want to do what the forcer asks. It involves the 'death' of the self by taking away everything that was previously known to a person (Chapman, 2008). It also involves torture (through sleep deprivation), humiliation, isolation, physiological depletion, and guilt manipulation, which may result in an overall collapse as well as the complete change of a person's belief system (Chapman, 2008).

**The transformation process.** Hazelwood et al. (1993) describe the transformation that is undertaken by the sexual sadist in order to exert coercive control over the female. The selection of a vulnerable woman, seduction of the target woman, the shaping of sexual behaviour, social isolation, and punishment form part of this process (Hazelwood et al., 1993) and will be discussed below. This process is shown in Figure 2.3 following the discussion.

***The selection of a vulnerable woman.*** The abusive partner usually selects a vulnerable female, for example, a woman who has recently terminated a relationship or a woman with low self-esteem (Pistorius, 2006). According to Pistorius (2006),

sexual sadists often perceive women to be ‘whores’ and objects to use to act out their perverted sexual fantasies. These women are usually vulnerable, naïve, and passive (Pistorius, 2006). Their vulnerability is manipulated and used to act out the male’s need for control and complete domination (Hazelwood et al., 1993).

According to Chapman (2008), the sexual sadist usually selects women who have not previously been exposed to such sexual practices. This fact is consistent with the characteristics of the female sexual offender according to the study conducted by Mathews et al. (1991). According to Warren and Hazelwood’s (2002) study, they found that these women are usually well-educated, middle class women who have not been exposed to sexual sadism in the past. Warren and Hazelwood (2002) propose that it is every sexual sadist’s mission to transform a well-educated woman into a compliant victim and object which he can control. The sexual sadist may thus perceive this as the ultimate challenge.

***Seduction of the target woman.*** Sexual sadists initially seduce their target females by being caring and loving (Warren & Hazelwood, 2002). Once the female shows no resistance towards him, he begins his abusive behaviour (Warren & Hazelwood, 2002). These women may initially find their male co-perpetrators to be attentive, charming, considerate, and unselfish (Pistorius, 2006). The relationship will usually begin quickly, and although the woman may initially feel discomfort at this outwardly perfect male, she will disregard these feelings as he continues to show his affectionate side (Pistorius, 2006). This behaviour continues until he can be sure that he has won her over and that he can manipulate and use her to gratify his sexual needs (Chapman, 2008; Warren & Hazelwood, 2002).

***Shaping sexual behaviour.*** The male will slowly introduce new sexual activities to the repertoire of the female (Warren & Hazelwood, 2002). This

introduction may start with various activities and may then gradually include more violent sexual activities (Warren & Hazelwood, 2002). For example, the male may initially introduce anal intercourse to the sexual repertoire of the female. When this occurs, activities such as vaginal intercourse cease to interest the male (Warren & Hazelwood, 2002). The male may demonstrate his gratitude towards the female for performing certain activities. However, he may also demonstrate his disappointment if she is unwilling to participate in such acts (Warren & Hazelwood, 2002). Eventually, if she resists, he may use threats in order to gain compliance (Chapman, 2008).

According to Ludsin and Vetten (2005), the victim's personality is slowly eroded to such an extent that a new self-image and identity are constructed. The woman may adopt the constructed identity of the abuser (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). This process is conducted through the repetitive infliction of psychological trauma in addition to violence, terror, and helplessness which have an accumulative effect on the victim's sense of self and her sense of self in relation to others (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005).

According to Pistorius (2006), while violence could be one way in which coercive control is achieved, it does not need to be constant – the mere threat of violence may be sufficient to result in compliance from the female. The violence may take many forms such as threats from the male to harm her children and/or her family, or threats of suicide (Pistorius, 2006). Pistorius (2006) states that when an abusive partner does not act on the threats, a paradoxical effect results as the female is grateful to the abuser for not carrying out the abusive behaviour and for not taking her life.

The occasional acts of gentleness or expressions of affection encourage the victim to hope that the abuser will stop torturing her and that they will allow her to survive (Pistorius, 2006). Such acts result in her eliminating her rage towards the

abuser. Through this process, she begins to experience the abuser as someone who cares deeply for her welfare (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). Over time, an abused woman's identity will come to be defined by the abuser, and thereby her sense of self will be replaced, including her identity, integrity, thoughts, and values (Pistorius, 2006). Such a replacement could be referred to as the undifferentiated ego mass (Hoffman, 1981).

This systematic replacement of the abused woman's self may be achieved through psychological abuse such as humiliating, insulting, and verbally abusing her (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). She may be humiliated in the presence of others, which may contribute to her being further isolated from others (Pistorius, 2006). This form of emotional and psychological abuse wears the woman down and begins to convince her that such belittlement accurately describes her (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). The abusive partner seeks to destroy the abused woman's sense of independence through supervising and controlling her body and her bodily functions (Pistorius, 2006). This supervision may include monitoring her meals, when she sleeps, and what she wears (Pistorius, 2006). The sexual abuser also demonstrates complete control of her body and makes belittling remarks both verbally and non-verbally (Pistorius, 2006). The woman may comply with unwanted sexual behaviour because the cost of resistance is more damaging to her self-esteem than the abusive sexual acts (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005).

***Social isolation.*** After the shaping of social isolation, the abuser continues to isolate the woman socially from her family and friends, and he will then continue to punish her sexually and psychologically (Abby & Jacques-Tiura, 2011; Pistorius, 2006). Chapman (2008) asserts that the social isolation stage occurs as the male becomes both possessive and jealous of all activities that do not involve him. The abuser may only be effective in his domination if the woman he is abusing is

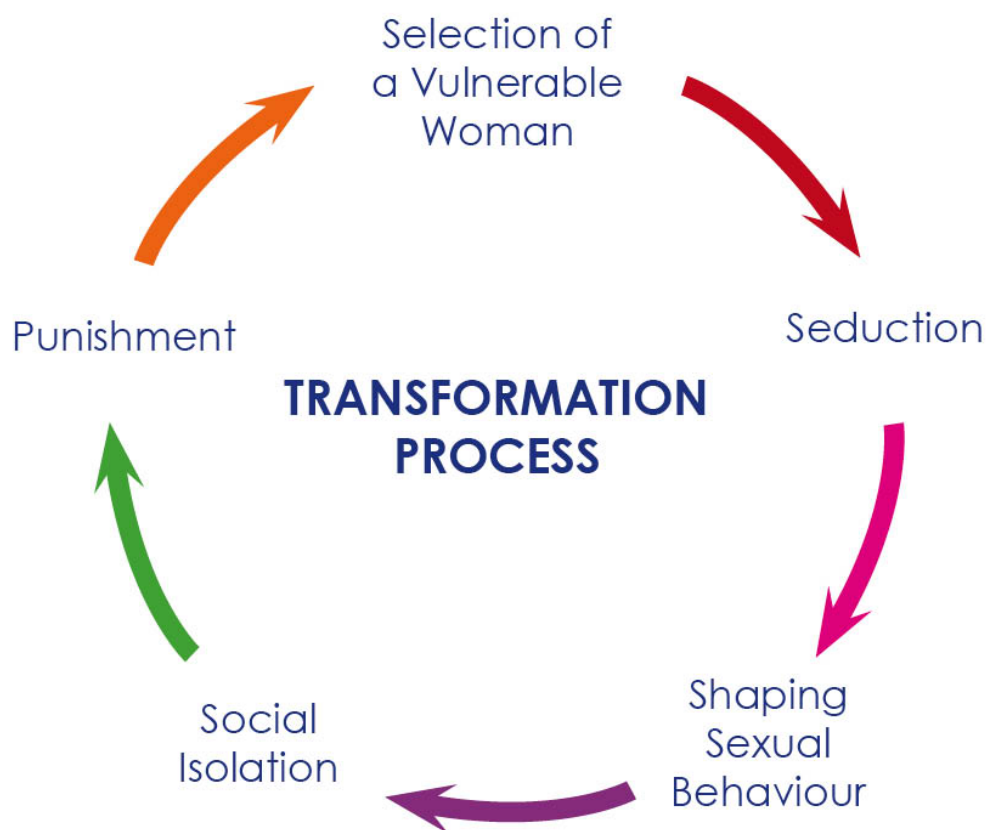
completely disconnected from others (Chapman, 2008). The abuser will do his best to isolate her and to disconnect her relationships with others (Chapman, 2008). The woman will then sacrifice her important relationships (such as family relationships) to serve as proof of her loyalty and obedience to the abuser (Hazelwood et al., 1993). This phenomenon could be referred to as a closed system because no new information comes into the system, and thus the system enters into entropy (Hoffman, 1981).

***Punishment.*** According to Ludsin and Vetten (2005), the repeated experience of fear and making excuses, especially within the isolated context of the love relationship, may result in extreme feelings and ‘worship’ dependence on a dominant and almost god-like male figure (Herman, 1992). According to Herman (1992), the final step in achieving complete control occurs when the victim is forced to breach her own moral principles. Ludsin and Vetten (2005) believe that this is the most destructive form of all of the coercive techniques because when a woman surrenders her moral principles, she is believed to despise herself. I am of the opinion that the women’s surrendering her moral principles could also be seen as a special bond and secret uniting the couple. This is because the women are forced to participate in illegal activity such as sexual abuse. The implications of the sexual abuse, is that it would be difficult to share this information with others without implicating herself. Thus the sexual abuse becomes a special bond that unites the couple.

I believe that victims of sexual coercion are more likely to continue with a coercive relationship and that they are less likely to report the incident if the perpetrator has higher authority than themselves. This authority could, for example, take the form of the male having a higher professional status than the female.

According to Chapman (2008), there are few researchers who have made a connection between the concepts of coercive control, brainwashing, and abused

women. However, it is evident that these concepts have similar processes, such as isolation, dependence, fear, helplessness, unpredictable attacks, sleep deprivation, and feelings of entrapment, depression, and guilt (Chapman, 2008). The manner in which the abuser or sexual sadist attempts to gain power over the compliant victim is very similar to the tactics that have been used to gain control over prisoners of war (Chapman, 2008). I hypothesise that the transformation process that occurs between a dominant male sexual offender and a female sexual offender, particularly regarding the shaping of sexual behaviour and breaking down the female's moral code, could explain Harris' (2010) category of the male-coerced female sexual offender.



*Figure 2.3.*Coercive control – transformation process (Hazelwood et al., 1993)

This cycle depicts the transformation process that occurs between the sexual sadist and the compliant victim.

## **The Impact of Female Sexual Abuse on the Victim**

I have included this section because female sexual abuse does not occur in isolation. Therefore, when considering the female sexual offender, it is also important to consider the impact of female sexual abuse on the victim. The long-term effects of sexual abuse committed by males have been studied extensively in the existing literature on the subject. However, in contrast, the effects of female sexual abuse have barely been researched.

The consequences of sexual abuse, in general, may generate a number of long-term effects on the victims. These effects could include anxiety, depression, sexual identity confusion, difficulty with sexual functioning, low self-esteem, relationship difficulties and substance abuse problems (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985; Denov, 2004b; Hislop, 2001). According to Finkelhor and Browne (1985), there are four traumagenic dynamics that could cause a range of symptoms seen in children who have been sexually abused by females. These dynamics are stigmatisation, betrayal, powerlessness, and traumatic sexualisation (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986), which will be discussed below.

### **Stigmatisation**

Sexual victimisation committed by both male and female perpetrators is a violation of boundaries that contributes to victims perceiving themselves as being different from their peers (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). These violations of the victims' boundaries may lead to feelings of shame and guilt, particularly if the individual is unsure about whether to disclose the sexual abuse (Hislop, 2001). If these individuals are unwilling to report the sexual offence, it may lead them to withdraw from others and to isolate themselves (Denov, 2004b). Consequently, victims may embark on self-destructive behaviour such as substance abuse,

risk-taking, self-harm, suicide, suicide attempts, and self-defeating manners of relating to others in interpersonal relationships (Saradjian, 2010).

Sexual abuse perpetrated by females is often considered to be extremely rare (Saradjian, 2010). However, this view of female sexual abuse increases the likelihood of stigmatisation and the related feelings of shame and guilt, which may perpetuate the cycle of withdrawal and isolation (Denov, 2004b). Consequently, stigmatisation, as well as the isolation and sense of alienation felt by victims, makes them more vulnerable to internalising the perpetrator's beliefs about them, such "Mummy touched my tickle (vagina) because I was a bad sexy girl" (Saradjian, 2010, p.23).

**The effect of stigmatisation on the professional.** Female sexual abuse is often considered by professionals to be relatively harmless in comparison to sexual abuse committed by males (Denov, 2004b). Saradjian (2010) found that victims who have attempted to report incidents of female sexual abuse are often dismissed or even ignored by professionals. The literature indicates that sexual abuse committed by females is considered to be relatively insignificant (Finkelhor, 1984; Hetherton, 1999). In the preamble of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a), it states that women and children are a vulnerable population. Although the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) has been extended to include gender-neutral definitions of rape and sexual assault, it is evident that only male sexual abuse is considered to be a problem. The slant of the legislation regarding female and male sexual offending may also have an impact on the manner in which professionals and the public view female sexual offending.

Denov (2004b) found that professional biases are often reflected in the general public's perceptions of female sexual offending. For example, in a study conducted by Hetherton and Beardsall (1998), the authors identified gender bias present in



professionals such as social workers and police officers working with child protection policies. Not only was such gender bias evident in the lower number of warrants issued for female sexual offenders, but also in the number of case registrations and imprisonments of male perpetrators (Hetherington & Beardsall, 1998). It was found that male sexual offending was considered more important by both these professional groups (Hetherington & Beardsall, 1998). Saradjian (2010) warns that if professionals continue to dismiss victims and the disclosure of female sexual abuse, victims of such crimes will be likely to stop reporting these crimes.

According to Bailey (2008), less than one percent of sexual offenders tried in South Africa are females. Bailey (2008) also states that cases involving female sexual offenders are usually considered unusual and extraordinary. Often girls that were accused of sexual abuse were referred for rehabilitation instead of prosecution (Bailey, 2008). In South Africa, as well as in international research, it was found that other professionals, such as psychiatrists and police officials, were found to be more likely to deny female sexual abuse by considering this kind of abuse to be less harmful than male sexual abuse (Hetherington & Beardsall, 1998; Kramer, 2010).

The denial of sexual abuse committed by females may have serious and dangerous consequences for the victims of such abuse. Such denial may affect child protection plans as well as rehabilitation programmes for female sexual offenders (Denov, 2004b). As a consequence of the denial of female sexual offending by professionals and the general public, victims who may come forward to report female sexual abuse may feel that the abuse is trivialised (Denov, 2004b). This denial of the problem may ultimately lead to a delay in victims being referred to social services and child protection units (Denov, 2004b). In addition, if the victim's account of the abuse is minimised or disbelieved, it may result in secondary victimisation (Denov, 2004b).

Secondary victimisation involves the victim being blamed for the offence, which may increase feelings of shame, guilt, and fear (Saradjian, 2010).

Denov (2004a) states that the victims of female sexual offences could provide valuable information regarding female sexual offenders. By assessing the victim's perspective, researchers and professionals may gain an understanding of the nature, characteristics, and effects of female sexual offending as well as the consequences and implications for professionals working with both victims and perpetrators of sexual offences (Denov, 2004a).

### **Betrayal**

In a study conducted by Denov (2004a), it was shown that female sexual offences had detrimental consequences for both male and female victims. These consequences depend on a number of factors, such as the victim-perpetrator relationship, age of onset of the abuse, duration of the abuse, frequency of the abuse, and the severity of the sexual abuse (Denov, 2004a). Victims may experience a deep sense of betrayal that is similar to the betrayal experienced by victims of male sexual abuse (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985).

Denov (2004a) states that this sense of betrayal could also be regarded as being connected to society's perception of females, which is that females are generally seen as being nurturers, caregivers, maternal figures, and protectors. This sense of betrayal may also be exacerbated by professional bias where professionals either experience levels of discomfort when confronted with cases of female sexual abuse, or they may be outraged when confronted with such cases (Denov, 2004a). In this sense, the victims of female sexual abuse develop a general distrust towards females, which may also impact on the manner in which professionals handle the reporting of the abuse and the treatment programmes.

Issues of gender, sexuality, and identity are some of the factors that need to be taken into account when dealing with female sexual abuse (Denov, 2004a). Such factors should be considered when female professionals deal with victims of such abuse. Female and male professionals need to be aware of their impact on victims when establishing rapport and trust. For example, one victim's account of reporting a female sexual abuse incident to a male professional indicates that comments such as "he was lucky" and "I wish I had that happen to me when I was his age" were made when he reported the case (Munro, 2002, p.1).

Both male and female victims of female sexual abuse fear that they will sexually abuse others themselves (Denov, 2004a). This fear also leads to some female victims deciding not to have children (Denov, 2004a). Such fear could also lead some victims to feel that they cannot have a complete parental relationship with their children because they are afraid that it may turn into a sexual relationship, particularly when the child reaches the age when they themselves were first sexually abused (Denov, 2004a).

### **Powerlessness**

Other feelings experienced by both female and male victims are feelings of rage, anger, and the desire for retaliation against the female sexual abuser (Saradjian, 2010). Rage and anger may manifest in the form of self-mutilation, slashing, cutting, or burning oneself (Saradjian, 2010). One victim described this process as "tattooing one's rage on one's skin" (Denov, 2004a, p.1145). According to Denov (2004a), such behaviour could be seen as a way of self-expression and a manner of coping with the distress. Other victims have reported experiencing feelings of suicidal ideation throughout their lives, although it is unclear if other, unrelated factors could have

contributed to such feelings (Denov, 2004a). Victims also report attempted suicides (Denov, 2004a). Some victims also experience depression (Denov, 2004a).

A child that has been abused may also have an increased sense of powerlessness (especially when the abuser is their mother) because the child's entire life is controlled by the offender (Saradjian, 2010). According to Saradjian (2010), the formation of a feeling of powerlessness may also lead to vulnerability and the need to be in control. The presence of such feelings may make the child more susceptible to identification with the aggressor, and the victim may later exploit others by using similar tactics (Saradjian, 2010). Other victims may experience the need to be in control in different ways in their adult relationships, such as only being sexually aroused if their partners are completely passive (Saradjian, 2010).

A child may also respond to sexually abusive behaviour by avoiding, repressing, and dissociating emotions, or by running away from home (Saradjian, 2010). If the child is unable to manage the negative emotions of the sexual abuse, the child may develop various negative coping strategies, such as phobias, sleeping problems, eating disorders, or obsessive compulsive tendencies (Saradjian, 2010). Saradjian (2010) also mentions that, in extreme cases where a child is abused by his or her mother, they become unable to cope physically with the abuse and may psychologically close up their cognitive and social processes, which may result in learning difficulties.

### **Traumatic Sexualisation**

Victims may also have difficulties with their self-concept and identity (Saradjian, 2010). Some females report negating their own sexual identity, particularly when their children grow up (Saradjian, 2010). Female victims report that they negate their sexual identity because of the fear that they will assume the female

abuser's role (Saradjian, 2010). Male victims report that they are embarrassed after the abuse has taken place (Saradjian, 2010). At times, they also report that they both deny and question the existence of the sexual abuse (Saradjian, 2010). Male victims report denying the abuse as females are considered to be the weaker sex, and therefore these male victims question their own masculinity (Denov, 2004a; Saradjian, 2010).

One male reported becoming hyper-masculine and taking part in highly aggressive sports, narcotics trafficking, and organised crime in order to provide him with a sense of manliness and to increase his self-esteem (Denov, 2004a; Saradjian, 2010). He also mentioned that he gained self-esteem through sexual activity with girls who were sexually inexperienced (Denov, 2004a; Saradjian, 2010). However, the consequence of his behaviour was that his sexual activity constantly reminded him of the sexual abuse perpetrated by his mother (Denov, 2004a; Saradjian, 2010).

Many victims report a general sense of discomfort with sex as it brings back memories of sexual abuse (Munro, 2002). Victims' discomfort with sex may impact on the professionals trying to assist them. According to Munro (2002), male victims report that therapists, counsellors, and other professionals who are mostly trained in female-centred models of victimisation are unable to assist these male victims. According to Munro (2002), male victims have a strong need to be validated and heard when dealing with female sexual abuse.

### **Family Systems Perspective on Female Sexual Abuse**

This section has been included to describe the interrelatedness of various system and subsystems using the family systems perspective. My post-graduate training focused on the family systems perspective, and in my training I became aware of the importance of understanding symptoms and their function within the context of a system.

Family systems theory emerged from the general systems theory which describes a system as a set of interrelated elements displaying logical behaviour as a trait of that system (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). These objects interact through patterns of behaviour and are separated by boundaries (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). The system should also be seen as more than the sum of its parts, and its messages and rules should be considered as shaping each member of the system (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Messages refer to information that is given and received by members of the system. These messages can occur verbally or non-verbally (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Rules refer to the values of a system as well as the roles suitable to different behaviours within that system; these rules distinguish each system from the other (Becvar & Becvar, 2009).

Each member of the system is referred to as a subsystem (Von Bertalanffy, 1950). Based on Von Bertalanffy's (1950) ideas, the assumptions underlying the general systems theory contributed towards an understanding of human behaviour. This theory assumes that, in order to understand an individual, the individual cannot be separated from the members they interact with (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Each individual is considered to be part of a system that is interacting and interconnecting with its parts (Becvar & Becvar, 2009).

Each individual is a part of a family system, and hence they may also be part of many different interconnecting systems such as a community system or a legal system. Each system has its own set of rules and boundaries which facilitate how the system functions and organises itself. These rules express values to the system and dictate roles of behaviour within the system (Minuchin et al., 2007).

According to Minuchin et al. (2007), the organisation of a family will facilitate certain types of experiences and behaviour. Therefore, how a family organises itself

should be understood as it also provides an understanding of which types of relationships encourage certain behaviour, such as submissive or deviant behaviour.

From a family systems perspective, dysfunctional behaviour such as sexual abuse can be seen as part of the patterns of behaviour that are maintained by more than one member of the family system (McClendon, 1991). The victim of sexual abuse can thus be considered to be the identified patient within the family system, so too can the perpetrator (McClendon, 1991). This victim could be seen as carrying the symptom of the dysfunction within the family. According to McClendon (1991), sexual abuse forms part of a larger pattern of dysfunction, such as marital conflict or financial difficulties that are present within a family.

According to the family systems perspective, every system has rules which are either 'implicit' or 'explicit' (Minuchin et al., 2007). These rules express values to the systems and dictate the roles of behaviour within a system, as mentioned above. The family is the primary social context in which a child is socialised regarding the rules and norms of the family and society. McClendon (1991) points out that a child internalises the rules and norms that their parents hold. Minuchin et al. (2007) state that rules within a particular system distinguish that particular system from other systems. Thus, as a result of internalisation of these roles of behaviour and norms these rules and boundaries are formed (Minuchin et al., 2007).

Each system has its own unique set of rules. Therefore, for example, one particular family will have different rules to another family. According to Minuchin (1991), boundaries are not visible, but instead are deduced from the repeated patterns of behaviour within a system. The individuals within a system are not always aware of the rules of that particular system (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). For example, a family may implicitly expect the female members to behave in a certain manner, such as

being submissive. It is my opinion that these female sexual offenders may implicitly define relationships outside of the family in the same manner. Such individuals may not be aware of any other way in which to define relationships, and thus they will define both their intra- and interpersonal relationships in a similar fashion. According to McNamee and Gergen, (1993) individuals co-construct meaning within a relationship. Therefore reality can be seen as being co-constructed within a relationship and thus reality is a product of that system (McNamee & Gergen, 1993).

There are two types of boundaries within a family system, namely open and closed boundaries (Minuchin, 1991). Minuchin (1991) states that there should be clear boundaries for each subsystem for a family to function effectively. Clear boundaries allow each subsystem within the family to function without interference; however, it should also allow the various subsystems to connect with one another (Minuchin, 1991). Boundaries that are clear between the subsystems should also be flexible semi-permeable for a system to function effectively. According to the family systems perspective, dysfunction within a couple or within a family often occurs when there are closed boundaries (Minuchin, 1991). Dysfunction within a system could also occur where there is a lack of clear boundaries as this provides no protection for the family members and they are not able to function without interference (Minuchin, 1991). For a system to function optimally, it should have semi-permeable boundaries (Hoffman, 1981).

According to McClendon (1991), an unhealthy family system, such as a system with closed boundaries, does not contain equal power as compared to other systems that they are interacting with or equal power between members of the same system. Consequently, the higher subsystems usually rule over the lower subsystems that are then seen as subservient (Minuchin, 1991). The higher subsystem can thus



rule and limit the roles and behaviours of the lower subsystem, which may lead to unhealthy adaptations (Minuchin, 1991). The higher subsystem's domination may even lead to an isolation of the lower system from outside influences (Hoffman, 1981; McClendon, 1991; Minuchin et al., 2007).

In addition, Bowen (1988, cited in Hall, 1981) mentions that triangulation plays a significant role in the understanding of a relationship. When there is a dyad, the relationship remains relatively stable while the relationship is going well (Minuchin, 1991). However, if a problem arises, either member of the dyad may draw a third person into the situation to form a triangle (Minuchin, 1991). The presence of a third person may become a problem when an individual feels that there is a two-against-one situation (Minuchin, 1991).

According to Bowen (1988, cited in Hall, 1981), two individuals' emotional systems will include a third person under times of stress. According to McClendon (1991), triangulation may occur when adults take their tension out on their children because they are unable to deal with the uncomfortable situation of tension. This pattern is commonly associated with sexual abuse, which means that the child is elevated into the status of the parental hierarchy – the system is thus maintained through role reversal such as when a mother and son begin a sexual relationship.

From the above explanation of the family systems perspective it is evident that an individual cannot be seen in isolation. Therefore the female sexual offender's behaviour cannot be seen in isolation. Instead, it should be seen in relation to the context. In turn, the context should be seen in relation to the behaviour of the female sexual offender. Thus, when characterising the female sexual offender a circular approach should also be used in order to ensure a richer understanding of the above-mentioned process.

## **Conclusion**

It has become well recognised that both females and males are capable of committing sexual offences (Tsopelas et al., 1990). However, sexual offences committed by females have not been thoroughly researched because of various cultural, social, and professional understandings of the role of females (Tsopelas et al., 1990). These various viewpoints have resulted in a limited number of these cases being reported, which may further limit the research available regarding this particular area.

A lack of research regarding female sexual offenders has resulted in a limited number of theories regarding female sexual offenders. In addition, the lack of research on female sexual offending has resulted in the phenomenon being seen as atypical, isolated, and inconsequential (Hetherington, 1999). Despite these misconceptions, theories and the development of theories on female sexual offenders are important as significant dimensions and insight into these types of offenders may be neglected if male theories of sexual offending are applied directly to female sexual offenders.

In this chapter, the available literature regarding female sexual offenders was examined in an attempt to gain an understanding of the definition of sexual abuse as defined by South Africa legislation. The impact of socio-cultural influences, professional bias, limited research, and the victims' unwillingness to report these types of offences on the underreporting of female sexual offenders was also examined.

Thereafter, the characteristics of female sexual offenders were discussed, and these characteristics were then compared to the characteristics of male sexual offenders. The typologies of female sexual offenders were also described and illustrated. In the final section of this chapter, I discussed the theories regarding

female sexual offenders, namely multi-factor theories, single-factor theories, and micro-level factor theories. Theories pertaining directly to male-coerced female sexual offenders were then discussed. I also discussed the impact of female sexual abuse on the victims of such abuse. Finally, I provided a discussion of the family systems perspective and its importance in investigating and understanding female sexual offending.

## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I explain the research process I used to collect the information applicable to the study. I systematically reviewed ten original international research articles published over the past ten years (2002 to 2012) in peer-reviewed academic journals to collect data. The study is guided by a basic set of beliefs and assumptions that inform my approach to the research, namely the research paradigm. The research paradigm I use is postmodernism. I also specifically refer to social constructionism. The research paradigm and the research design are also discussed in detail.

The research design is described by using central terms such as the qualitative research approach, a systematic review, and the location of research articles. The section thereafter focuses on data gathering, which includes a description on the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the research articles used in the study. The final section of this chapter discusses the data analysis phase and thematic content analysis. Furthermore, the credibility and trustworthiness as well as the ethical considerations of the study are explored.

### **Research Paradigm**

According to De Vos (2002), the term ‘research paradigm’ refers to the manner in which a researcher views their research material. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006) state that the term ‘paradigm’ refers to a comprehensive system of interrelated practices and thinking which form the researcher’s nature of inquiry. The name of the inquiry includes the following three dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Ontology refers to the nature of the reality that is to be studied (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). It refers to what exists and to that which can exist as well as the manner in which the realities can be

grouped or placed in a hierarchy (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Epistemology refers to the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what the researcher can know (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Epistemology entails how we know what we know (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Methodology refers to the manner in which the researcher goes about studying the phenomenon under study (Durrheim, 2006). In this study, I use social constructionism as the nature of inquiry in order to explore the research questions. The main research question is the following: What are the findings of studies conducted on female sexual offenders' behavioural and contextual characteristics over the past ten years?

I chose this topic as a result of my interest in the phenomenon of female sexual offending. Furthermore, I was struck by the lack of scientific studies in a South African context regarding female sexual offending, despite the number of cases of such offending that are reported in South African newspaper articles. The lack of South African literature on the phenomenon, together with my legal, clinical psychological and criminological background led me to explore the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders. The goal of this study is to explore the similarities and the differences between the findings of studies regarding original research articles published in journals over the past ten years on female sexual offenders. A further goal is to identify lacunas in the literature as well as to make recommendations for future research on the phenomenon of female sexual offending.

### **Social Constructionism**

I use the social constructionist perspective to understand the phenomenon under study. Social constructionism originates from postmodernist ontology, which indicates that such researchers set out to understand the phenomenon under study

from the perspective that there is no one universal truth (Durrheim, 2009). Instead, truth is seen as a perspective (Du Preez, 2005). Thus, the meanings that researchers attach to their participants' experiences are socially constructed (Durrheim, 2009). Postmodernism rejects the idea of one universal truth and a master theory (Du Preez, 2005). However, it encourages and celebrates multiplicity and deconstruction (Du Preez, 2005). Kvale (1996, cited in Du Preez, 2005) states that the term 'postmodernism' has been used to refer to the era after modernity, but it remains a controversial and ambiguous term. Postmodernism can also be interpreted as referring to philosophical reflections on postmodern culture (Du Preez, 2005).

According to Du Preez (2005), postmodernism challenges the view that reality is independent from the observer and instead suggests that language is a strong driving force. In this description, it becomes clear that postmodernism acknowledges the impossibility of arriving at a final meaning and instead invites the idea of possibility and multiplicity (Lax, 1993). This view holds that multiple realities exist regarding the same phenomenon (Lax, 1993). Lax (1993) points out that postmodernism emphasises that the self is conceived not as a rectified entity, but instead as a narrative. Lax (1993) also posits that postmodernists believe that text is not something to be interpreted, but instead that it is an evolving process. The individual is seen within a context of social meaning instead of an intra-psychic entity (McNamee & Gergen, 1993). The postmodern view also posits that scientific knowledge or 'facts' about the world are actually narrative knowledge emphasising communal beliefs about how the world is seen (Lax, 1993).

Postmodernists do not believe in a universal truth (McNamee & Gergen, 1993). They instead believe in a multi-verse or plurality of ideas regarding the world (Lax, 1993). Reality is thus seen as inevitably subjective (McNamee & Gergen,

1993). Therefore, facts should be seen as a perspective which may challenge the power and privilege of those who are seen to possess knowledge (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Thus, social systems are considered to be meaning generating and problem organising systems (McNamee & Gergen, 1993). Problems are therefore seen to exist and are mediated through language (McNamee & Gergen, 1993). According to Becvar and Becvar (2009), the most significant shift in the postmodernist era was a shift from the belief in facts to the idea of perspectives. Consequently, there was a greater emphasis placed on the use and role of language during this era, which resulted in movement towards social constructionism (McNamee & Gergen, 1993). Social constructionism is often used in qualitative approaches rather than quantitative approaches because of its approach of generating meaning and perspective (McNamee & Gergen, 1993).

Postmodern thinking brought about the idea of social constructionism. The social constructionist theory was thus a reaction to the criticism directed towards the one-sided individualism and technological era of modern times (Richardson & Fowers, 2001). This one-sided and mainstream idea of the world was thought to be an attempt at trying to make the world objective (Richardson & Fowers, 2001). Post modernism rejected philosophers such as Habermas (1991, cited in Richardson & Fowers, 2001) who attempted to define an objective universal standard or procedure for critically evaluating values and practices. The social constructionist theory was influenced by social constructivism which believes that truth is constructed by social processes that are culturally and historically specific (Richardson & Fowers, 2001). According to McNamee and Gergen (1993), social constructivism meant that the notions of psychological processes are clearly different from one culture to the next.

The social constructionist theory further states that truth may also be shaped by power struggles within a community. Therefore, all truths depend on social conventions, perceptions, and social experience. Social constructionists further posit that even physical and biological realities (such as race, sexuality, and gender) are a form of social construction. Social constructionists believe that knowledge is constructed as it does not reflect any external moving realities. They hypothesise that beliefs and values are relative. Furthermore, they believe that culture plays an important role in the process of explaining and interpreting the world, which means that all values and truths should be evaluated according to their surrounding cultures (Richardson & Fowers, 2001). McNamee and Gergen (1993) believes that a person's experiences are linguistically constructed and historically embedded in discourse. The implication of social constructionist theory is that there is no correct method or procedure of finding truth or one objective truth (Richardson & Fowers, 2001).

Critical theorists such as Hegel and Marx (1993, cited in Sloan, 2001) make a distinction between true knowledge and knowledge that has been distorted through power or ideology. Knowledge is seen as a social construction entailing the hermeneutic circle of interpretation-action, which means that knowledge does not take place in a vacuum (Sloan, 2001). The term 'hermeneutic' implies that no interpretation or observation is free from the effects of the observer's experiences, ideas, and values (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Thus, just like knowledge, language is seen as being a socially constructed reality (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). The beliefs that construct the realities are generated through communication processes (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). The constructionist perspective states that the organisational closure of a system is maintained through interactions, that change occurs through stability,



that autonomy takes place through constraints, and that novel possibilities can be found through these constraints (McNamee & Gergen, 1993).

Fruggeri (1993) also mentions that researchers' descriptions are linked to their maps and perceptions of the world. Researchers will perceive what their viewpoints will allow them to perceive. However, researchers' descriptions are constrained by the descriptions of the readers' own descriptions (Fruggeri, 1993). Therefore, researchers' constructions are linked to the way in which their actions are interpreted by the readers as well as the way in which researchers themselves perceive the questions, comments and interventions (McNamee & Gergen, 1993).

The researchers' constructions are further constructed by the way that researchers interpret a set of data (Fruggeri, 1993). Therefore, there is no correct or incorrect meaning – instead it is a meaning that is achieved according to the specific belief system/s of those involved (Fruggeri, 1993). These belief systems are generated through people's experiences as members of a culture and social community (McNamee & Gergen, 1993). In this study, my experiences are generated through my postgraduate training in clinical psychology focusing on social constructionism. My training in both the legal and criminology fields therefore also influences my experiences.

Fruggeri (1993) returns to the researcher's dilemmas and mentions that the researcher does not have the power to change or to determine the direction of change unilaterally. The researcher's actions are not of unilateral control, but instead, they place the dynamics of the systemic co-construction (McNamee & Gergen, 1993). From this perspective, power and responsibility are always good (Fruggeri, 1993). However, the researcher should neither be too powerful, nor should they give in to power. Instead, the researcher should take responsibility for their power of

construction within the constraints of the relational or social domain (Fruggeri, 1993). As power is not unilaterally determined, respect for others is also not unilaterally determined (McNamee & Gergen, 1993). Both power and respect are part of an interactive process where respect is offered and then accepted or recognised (Fruggeri, 1993).

### **Research Design**

The research design explains the purpose of the research, the theoretical paradigm informing the research, the context or circumstances of the research as well as the research techniques used to collect and to analyse the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fouché & Delport, 2002). The research design thus guides the researcher in determining the manner in which they would like to explore the chosen phenomenon. This study is conducted by using a qualitative research approach. I have thus used a systematic review of ten research articles to obtain information on female sexual offending. I decided to use a qualitative research paradigm because I wish to gain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of female sexual offending. The qualitative research paradigm assists in defining the manner in which information is located and the manner in which the data is gathered and analysed (Fouché & Delport, 2002). This study uses thematic content analysis and interpretation of the data.

### **Research Method**

There are three approaches which are commonly used in research, namely a qualitative approach, a quantitative approach, and a combination of both a qualitative and quantitative approach referred to as a mixed-method approach (Fouché & Delport, 2002). Qualitative and quantitative research paradigms are distinctive and different (Fouché & Delport, 2002). The distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research are discussed below.

In qualitative research, the paradigm stems from an anti-positivistic approach (Fouché & Delport, 2002). A researcher using this paradigm will attempt to gain a comprehensive view of a particular phenomenon (Fouché & Delport, 2002). They will also aim to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday experiences (Fouché & Delport, 2002). I adhere to a qualitative research approach by undertaking a subjective exploration of the phenomenon of female sexual offending. Thus, I acknowledge that I cannot be objective and that the research will inevitably be influenced by my own experiences, feelings, and ideas. The research design employed in this study is unique, and it continued to evolve throughout the research process. I also use methods of inductive logic, while data sources are determined by information based on the richness of the setting and the information that is gained from the setting. When analysing the elements, a qualitative researcher analyses the elements holistically by focusing on the relationship between the elements and the context (Fouché & Delport, 2002).

The quantitative research paradigm is rooted in positivism, and therefore it undertakes a scientific explanation based on universal principles and laws (Struwig & Stead, 2001). A researcher using this paradigm aims to measure certain aspects of the social world objectively to predict and control human behaviour (Struwig & Stead, 2001). In the quantitative research paradigm, the research design has fixed procedures which can be replicated (Struwig & Stead, 2001). Data is obtained methodically and in a standardised manner (Fouché & Delport, 2002). Concepts are also converted into operational definitions, and deductive logic is utilised (Struwig & Stead, 2001). The units used in quantitative research are analysed as elements that form part of a whole (Fouché & Delport, 2002). Measurements that are used thus focus on certain variables that are explained and examined through ratings scales, frequency counts,

and other means (Fouché & Delport, 2002). When using a quantitative research paradigm, a researcher will use statistical methods to determine associations between variables (Fouché & Delport, 2002).

A qualitative approach may be the preferred option when the research undertaken cannot be conducted experimentally because of practical or ethical reasons (Fouché & Delport, 2002). Thus, a qualitative approach will be used in this study because I aim to explore the phenomenon of female sexual offending holistically. I also attempt to seek, identify, and understand the relationship between elements and their context, as proposed by Fouché and Delport (2002). The purpose of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexities and processes of female sexual offending rather than simply seeking a cause and effect relationship.

Qualitative researchers seek to explain human action from an insider's perspective or the emic perspective (Fouché & Delport, 2002). The purpose of qualitative research is thus to construct a detailed description of social reality and the meaning that people attach to their everyday lives rather than simply testing hypotheses as well as the cause and effect of such hypotheses as in a quantitative study (Fouché & Delport, 2002). During qualitative analysis, the emphasis is on observations as well as analysis so that the researcher remains close to the research subject (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster, & Prozesky, 2010).

### **Systematic Review**

In this study, a systematic review of the literature has been used. The term 'systematic review' is derived from the term 'metasynthesis' (Arendt, 2007). According to Paterson, Dubouloz, Chevrier, Ashe, King, and Moldoveanu (2009), metasynthesis is an umbrella term that is used to describe a wide variety of approaches (including systematic review) used to synthesise a number of qualitative

research studies within a given field of study. Andreassen, Randers, Nyhlin, and Mattiasson (2007) mention that the term ‘qualitative metasynthesis’ is also referred to as qualitative meta-analysis, qualitative data analysis, or meta-ethnography. I have found that there are additional terms which have been used to explain these research methods, including critical review or a systematic review of the literature on a particular subject (Andreassen, et al., 2007). According to Arendt (2007), systematic reviews that make use of statistical techniques to combine results across studies are referred to as a meta-analysis.

In this study, I do not make use of statistical techniques to combine the results because I use a purely qualitative research method. A thematic content analysis is used instead of statistical techniques to analyse the findings in order to identify themes that emerge from the available literature. Such a systematic review is undertaken to identify the need to synthesise the various bodies of qualitative research and to produce novel knowledge regarding a particular phenomenon (Paterson et al., 2009).

This approach entails a technique of combining and summarising the findings of previous research (Arendt, 2007). The purpose of combining and summarising research findings is to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under study (Andreassen et al., 2007). Babbie et al. (2010) refer to this approach as secondary analysis because the researcher analyses the data that has been collected and processed by other researchers. Such an analysis is usually done for a different purpose than the purpose of the original research in other words to find out different information. In this study, female sexual offenders’ behavioural and contextual characteristics, as represented in research articles published over the past ten years,

will be explored. In the research articles that were located, I did not set out to explore the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offending.

Systematic reviews entail using a systematic approach to synthesising the literature on a particular topic (Arendt, 2007). In this study, the research focus is on female sexual offenders' behavioural and contextual characteristics as defined in Chapter One. Arendt (2007) suggests that a systematic review entails the researcher undertaking a thorough literature review. Upon conducting a systematic review, the articles/literature should be chosen based on pre-determined and defined criteria (Arendt, 2007). This element is discussed in greater depth below in the section 'Locating research articles'.

According to Britten, Campbell, Pope, Donovan, Morgan, and Pill, (2002) as well as Arendt (2007), a systematic review is considered to have less biased coverage of a particular topic than when undertaking a traditional literature review. Systematic reviews tend to be less biased because traditional literature reviews only consider literature that the researcher personally regards to be relevant or important when undertaking a study (Arendt, 2007). In this study, I use both pre-determined and emerging criteria to include and exclude certain research articles. I have used both types of criteria in order to eliminate the possibility of acknowledging only one truth. Instead, I thereby present a number of truths, and I thus align the research to social constructionism.

***Locating research articles.*** In this study, I use purposive sampling – a non-probable sampling technique – in order to locate the research articles. I decided to use purposive sampling because I first critically determined the parameters of the available research articles. I then chose the research articles accordingly. It is important for the researcher to formulate criteria clearly for the selection of the

research articles (Strydom & Delpont, 2002). In this study, the data has been limited to ten original research articles on female sexual offenders. In the context of this study, the term ‘female sexual offender’ is defined as a female who has been charged, arrested, and sentenced for a sexual offence/s as defined in Chapter One.

**Data gathering.** In the process of locating research articles, a combination of strategies was used to locate original research articles on the subject of female sexual offenders. These strategies are described below.

To determine the kinds of research terms that would be most effective in locating research articles, I first performed a search on Google Scholar. Thereafter, I limited my search to specific databases to find peer-reviewed scientific journals. The databases that were used are the following: EbscoHost Academic Search Premier, Africa-Wide, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health CINAHL with full text, Family and Society Studies Worldwide, Health Studies Nursing/Academic Edition, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, PsycBOOKS, PsycEXTRA, SocINDEX, and Social Work abstracts. Other databases that were used include Criminal Justice Journals, Health and Medical Journals, Nursing and Allied Journals, Psychology Journals as well as Research Library and Social Science Journals.

I found that, since these searches were not limited to publication dates or to a particular type of journal, they resulted in a large amount of articles that did not necessarily cover the research question of the study. I thus decided to limit the study to only include research articles that have been published in the last ten years. I also found that, in order to meet the criteria of the topic (namely an investigation of female sexual offenders), the topic in essence covered three major disciplines: law, criminology, and psychology. Therefore, I further limited the findings to journals

within these three disciplines. When locating the research articles, the following search terms were used: “female sex offender/s,” “female sexual offender/s”, “sex offender/s”, “sexual offender”, “sexual offences”, “female offenders”, “female criminals”, “female”, and “crime”.

After determining the major disciplines that encompassed the topic, I searched for textbooks on the phenomenon under study. These textbooks included subjects related to the topic of the research within the disciplines of psychology, criminology, and law. I used the above-mentioned research terms to find appropriate chapters within textbooks. The reference lists of these chapters and the textbooks were thoroughly searched to ascertain if any information sources would be relevant to the study and if there were additional articles referenced by the authors of the chapters and textbooks that could be used for this study. I searched the reference lists of all the articles that I thought could be used in the systematic review as well as the research articles that were excluded through the evaluation procedure. The process of locating research articles was undertaken during July 2012 to August 2012.

*Inclusion and exclusion criteria.* In this study, an inclusion criterion is that the articles had to have been based on original research published in English as this is my home language. Another inclusion criterion is that the research articles had to have been published in peer-reviewed journals. In addition to these criteria, the articles that were included had to be on adult female sexual offenders only. Therefore, articles on female sexual abusers were excluded. Thus, the females dealt with in the articles had to have been charged, arrested, and sentenced for a sexual offence. Both national and international articles were included in the study. However, no South African articles that pertained to the research question were found during this phase of data collection.



I excluded research articles that were in the format of editorials and other articles that did not have original research results (such articles included as meta-analyses and reviews on existing literature). I also excluded articles that did not focus on female sexual offenders. These articles generally focused on professionals and/or the public's opinion regarding female sexual offenders. Research articles on victims of female sexual offenders and adolescent female sexual offenders were also excluded because such articles did not match the aim of the research question, namely to explore the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders. I thus also excluded articles on adolescents as including the adolescent category would have made the scope of the research too broad as adolescent female sexual offending consists of a wide range of unique components.

The research articles were thus also limited to the period between 2002 and 2012 to gain an understanding of current literature on the phenomenon of female sexual offenders. By limiting the number of research articles, I was able to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the phenomenon to adhere to the qualitative aspects of the research rather than a quantitative approach. This chosen period of ten years is also significant as the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) came into operation during this period. This Act created a change in the perception of sexual offences and increased general interest in the phenomenon of female sexual offending. In addition to the influence of the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a), the highly published case of Cézanne Visser gained attention during this period. This case may also have increased the interest in female sexual offenders, and it may also have stimulated academic debate surrounding such offenders.

The research articles were first reviewed according to their titles. Thereafter, they were reviewed according to the contents of the abstracts. Finally, the full texts

were analysed in order to determine whether the research articles met the inclusion criteria as set out above. I also considered articles that met the research questions. Therefore, I considered articles that dealt with female sexual offenders' characteristics as well as the characteristics of female sexual offending. This information included terms such as behavioural patterns, profiles, *modus operandi*, motivations, demographics, and personality traits. Once this process was completed, I located ten original research articles that met the inclusion criteria.

### **Data Analysis**

After the research articles had been located and a sample had been identified, I analysed the data using thematic content analysis.

### **Thematic Content Analysis**

Terre Blanche, Durrheim, and Kelly (2006) illustrate the process of qualitative data analysis as the gradual fading out of data collection and the beginning of data analysis. Many authors, such as Babbie et al. (2010), describe data analysis as being multifaceted. Thus, there is no clear approach to analysing qualitative data. According to Babbie et al. (2010), the data analysis approach chosen depends on the topic of study, the research question, and the manner in which the researcher would like to answer the research question. When deciding on how to answer the research question, the researcher must consider which paradigm and theoretical approach they are comfortable using (Babbie et al., 2010). Although many authors, such as Silverman (2005), Terre Blanche et al. (2006), and Whitely (2001) explain qualitative data analysis in broad terms, Tesch (1990, cited in Babbie et al., 2010) gives a detailed description of theoretical data approaches regarding various forms of qualitative data analysis. Tesch's (1990, cited in Babbie et al., 2010) explanation is useful as it assists

the researcher in choosing the best possible type of data analysis for a particular study.

According to Paterson, Thorne, Canam, and Jilling (2001), any interpretative method can be applied depending on the purpose of the systematic review. In this study, I use thematic content analysis in order to analyse the findings of the data. Thematic content analysis is used because the aim of the research is to describe elements and prominent themes found in the data. When undertaking thematic content analysis in this study, the data was collected and recorded within a context of interaction. The data tends to display recurring characteristics or traits, referred to as patterns, which are categorised into themes (Paterson et al., 2001). When analysing the data collected from the research articles, thematic content analysis was used to ensure that I gained an understanding of the ideas that emerged during the review, as proposed by Aronson (1994).

Thematic content analysis can be described as the examination of words or phrases within a variety of texts (Babbie et al., 2010). For example, books, interviews, text, speeches, conversations, and poetry can be examined. Researcher can investigate the presence, absence, or repetition of certain words and phrases by using this approach (Babbie et al., 2010). By investigating these words and phrases, researchers are able to make inferences, such as inferences regarding the philosophical assumptions of the writer, the audience the text was intended for as well as the culture and time of the writer (Whitley, 2001). This type of analysis is very useful in certain contexts and is most often used by researchers wishing to study literature, marketing psychology, and cognitive science (Babbie et al., 2010).

According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), qualitative data analysis involves five phases. The first phase is to obtain an initial understanding of the information

(Terre Blanche et al., 2006). I thus examined the research articles thoroughly to make sense of the complexity of the articles in order to ensure that I understood their content. The second phases requires researchers to submerge themselves in the data by reading through the research articles, making notes, brainstorming, and marking important concepts, terms, and findings that are in line with current research question and aims of the research. To make valid conclusions from a research investigation, researchers need data to analyse and interpret (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In order for the research to be valid, the data must thus represent what the researchers experienced when gathering the data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The findings are discussed in Chapter Five.

During the analysis, themes are usually listed by using direct quotes or by paraphrasing common ideas (Aronson, 1994). Themes entail recurring ideas and findings that have developed from the literature review on the phenomenon under study (Aronson, 1994). These themes are located by key phrases such as a string of words, a sentence, or several sentences (Aronson, 1994). These key phrases should be connected by their content that usually answers the aim of the research question (Andreassen et al., 2007). Each research article is read a number of times in order to encode the key phrases and terms completely (Andreassen et al., 2007). I followed these recommendations in order to identify the key phrases.

The third phase in analysing the data is to induce and identify themes (Aronson, 1994). This process involves identifying themes by categorising the data into themes and subthemes (Aronson, 1994). These themes and subthemes as discussed by Aronson (1994) are discussed in my final chapter. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) encourage researchers to use language that emerges from the data, rather than using theoretical and complex language Themes and subthemes can range from

between five and twelve themes (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Both recurrent themes and deviances that emerge during the data analysis are highlighted (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In an attempt to understand each theme, the angles of the argument are clarified into themes (Aronson, 1994). Themes, as well as the various levels of these themes, are further divided into sub-themes (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Sub-themes are helpful as they assist the researcher in gaining a comprehensive view of the information and the themes that emerge through the data analysis (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). As these recurrent themes emerge, the researcher returns to the original data to gain a better understanding of those themes (Aronson, 1994). I used these processes to identify important themes and sub-themes.

The fourth phase in the analysis process is coding (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Coding refers to highlighting certain parts of the data that are similar or relevant to one or more themes (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). It involves breaking down the data into meaningful, labelled pieces in order to cluster them into coded material and to analyse them within a cluster in relation to the other parts of the data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Thus, holism is emphasised (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The data is then elaborated on by capturing the deeper meaning that was not specifically captured by the original coding system (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This phase aids in developing a thorough analysis and in giving an in-depth account of the data (Aronson, 1994). Terre Blanche et al. (2006) suggest that a researcher should keep on coding, elaborating, and recoding until no further important insights surface. I employed this method by constantly checking and re-checking the ten original research articles as well as by consulting the literature and by reconsidering the coding.

The fifth phase of data analysis involves the interpretation of the data, including producing a research article on the phenomenon under investigation (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This phase is characterised by finding parts of the data that compliment as well as contradict one another (Babbie et al., 2010). The research article should contain some evidence of the researcher's involvement in the research (Aronson, 1994). Once the research article has been drawn up, the researcher should construct a valid argument for choosing the themes by referring to the literature that has already been consulted (Babbie et al., 2010). Once the researchers have collected themes and studied the literature, they will be able to intertwine the literature with the findings of the data collected for a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon (Aronson, 1994). I employed these methods in order to merge the findings of the data to produce a comprehensive view of female sexual offending.

### **Credibility**

According to Silverman (2005), credibility refers to the extent to which a particular account accurately represents the social phenomenon it intends to represent. According to Stiles (1993), the credibility of a study should embrace the actions described below, namely triangulation, coherence, the uncovering of self-evidence, and reflective validity.

**Triangulation.** This entails a process whereby the researcher substantiates their data, interpretations, and conclusions by consulting a number of different sources of information (Stiles, 1993). The purpose of triangulation is for the researcher to gain access to multiple perspectives by thoroughly searching for information from multiple data sources and multiple theories (Stiles, 1993). In this study, I consulted a number of different sources and available research literature on the particular phenomenon, including various theories, newspaper articles, and South

African legislation (as discussed in Chapter Two). This study also achieved triangulation through a process of reviewing and re-reading the ten original research articles in order to determine whether I captured the essence of the articles. These meta-observations were also discussed with peers as well as with the supervisors of the study.

**Coherence.** This involves the quality of the interpretation (Stiles, 1993). Coherence thus refers to the quality of fit of the particular elements of a study, such as the researcher's intention for undertaking a study, the literature reviewed, the theoretical framework, the ontological and epistemological view, the information gathering methods as well as the interpretation of the data (Stiles, 1993). According to Stiles (1993), the coherence of a study is assessed by the reader.

**Uncovering self-evidence.** According to Stiles (1993), the uncovering of self-evidence refers to the idea that both the researcher and reader should feel right about the researcher's interpretation. Within this process, the researcher should make sense of their experiences and interpretations (Stiles, 1993). In addition, the researcher should also determine whether the concerns have been addressed (Stiles, 1993). I have kept these elements in mind by addressing my expectations of the findings as well as the possible gaps in the existing literature.

**Reflexive validity.** This refers to the manner in which the researcher's way of thinking has been changed through the research process (Stiles, 1993). Reflexive validity also thus refers to the manner in which the researcher interprets, understands, and perceives information (Stiles, 1993). In this study, my understanding of female sexual offenders' behavioural and contextual characteristics was also changed. According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), such changes could be seen as being reflexive because, when the researcher documents the findings, they should include a

commentary of their subjective response/s to the research process. Researchers thus acknowledge their role in the research process explicitly by including a commentary of their subjective responses (Stiles, 1993).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of consistency with which occurrences are assigned to the same category by various researchers or by the same researcher on another occasion (Silverman, 2005). Reliability is undertaken by consulting with colleagues as well as the relevant literature on the phenomenon. Stiles (1993) identify several strategies with regard to trustworthiness. These are discussed below.

**Disclosure of orientation.** This process involves a consideration of the researcher's expectations, preconceptions, and theoretical commitment (Stiles, 1993). In this study, I first undertook a thorough literature review before proceeding with the study. I also considered which relevant theories to use. At the beginning of the study, the researcher's background should be discussed, including aspects such as what field of expertise and beliefs may influence the interpretation (Stiles, 1993). Aspects of my background that may influence the study include my experience in criminology, criminal law, and psychology as well as my background in methodology and research and my interest in the phenomenon of female sexual offending.

**Grounding of interpretation.** Stiles (1993) refer to the grounding of interpretation as the linking of the interpretation to the content as well as to the context. In this study, I linked the interpretation both to the content and to the context, and I linked the themes to the literature, theory, and quotations from the ten original research articles.

**Asking 'what' not 'why'.** According to Stiles (1993), when 'what' questions are asked, they elicit materials for which there is direct knowledge. In this study, I



specifically answered ‘what’ questions, such as the following: What are the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders as represented in articles published over the past ten years?

To ensure that credibility and trustworthiness are carried throughout the research undertaken, the researcher should provide factually accurate information by using descriptive validity (Whitley, 2001). Such information has not been distorted and appears in its totality (Silverman, 2005; Struwig & Stead, 2001; Whitley, 2001). All sides of the information should thus be presented to the reader, including information which does not support or strengthen the research question (Stiles, 1993). I make use of deviant case analysis in this regard, which means that I actively set out to explore deviant cases. According to Silverman (2005), deviant case analysis involves the researcher being confronted by discrepant cases until the researcher has found a small set of recursive rules that encapsulate all the data in the analysis (Silverman, 2005). To further ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, concepts and data will not be generalised within a group. Instead, the data will focus on the specific cases under study, as suggested by Struwig and Stead (2001).

### **Ethical Considerations**

In order to ensure that the research undertaken is of a high quality and that it meets ethical standards, the researcher should be qualified and competent to undertake a particular research study (Struwig & Stead, 2001; Whitley, 2001). Thus, I sought the guidance of my supervisors who have extensive experience in issues regarding sexual abuse cases as well as psycho-legal work. I ensured that the information I have presented is honest, fair, and respectful towards others. During this research study, the standards of the profession have been upheld and responsibility for the information is guaranteed. The rights and dignity of others are respected at all times and the research

has been carefully monitored, as prescribed by the Health Professions Act (South Africa, 1974).

I ensured that the research has been planned and conducted in a manner that is consistent with the relevant legislation as well as with internationally accepted standards of conducting research, as defined by the Health Professions Act (South Africa, 1974). I ensured that the research has been conducted in line with the ethical standards prescribed by the profession of clinical psychology. Prior to conducting the research, I obtained written approval from the University of South Africa's (UNISA) Ethical Committee in order to conduct the research. I submitted a research proposal which set out the manner in which the research would be conducted. The information gathering process used during this study was conducted in terms of the research proposal that was approved by UNISA— a process prescribed by the Health Professions Act (South Africa, 1974). Furthermore, I acted ethically by seeking the assistance and guidance of my supervisors who have extensive experience regarding the topic under study.

All the information that has been gathered has been reported on correctly and accurately according to the data analysis. When reporting the data, the researcher should refrain from making value judgments (Strydom, 2002). I have refrained from making value judgements when undertaking the data analysis as according to the research paradigm and epistemology used in the study, namely social constructionism the meanings should be co-created. When information has been gathered by way of books, journals, court reports, or any other form of documentary analysis, the authors and researchers of these sources have been acknowledged and referenced where necessary. I have referenced all the sources that I have used to ensure that the information and ideas present in these sources are given credit where necessary and to

ensure that I have not plagiarised any information, as suggested by Struwig and Stead (2001).

I also ensured that the findings are based on the data reported in the original studies and that all the original studies have been published in peer-reviewed journals. Prior to conducting the study, I determined whether the researchers of these studies gained ethical approval from a research ethics committee prior to conducting their research. I provide a list of research articles that are used in the study, which includes the actual citation of the research articles, the objectives, data collection and analysis, sample description, the findings as well as the limitations as described by the researchers of each study. I have included this information to give the reader the opportunity to locate and to read the research articles should they feel the need to do so. This information also may give the reader the opportunity to determine if the findings of this study have been affected by the research methodology used by these authors. I also ensured that I have adhered to ethical considerations by thoroughly searching for research articles as well as questioning publication ethics. Hence, if I was unsure about the ethical standing of a particular research article, such a research article was not included in the research.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discuss the research process followed in order to assess the data for this study. In undertaking this study, I explored the findings of ten original research articles published over the past ten years regarding female sexual offenders' behavioural and contextual characteristics. A systematic review of the ten original research articles was thus used. I used postmodernist ontology and social constructionist epistemology to frame the research design. The choice of a qualitative research paradigm was discussed as well as the implications for this choice, as applied

to the study. Once the data had been gathered using the systematic review of the original research articles, I analysed the data using thematic content analysis. Finally, the credibility and trustworthiness as well as ethical considerations were discussed. The next chapter explores the themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis. These themes were then intertwined with the literature and theory established in Chapter Two.

## **Chapter Four: Interpretation**

### **Introduction**

This study focuses on the findings of ten original research articles published from 2002 to 2012 regarding the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders. This chapter focuses on the research findings and discussions of these articles regarding themes, and sub-themes. In this study the principles of trustworthiness and dependability were met through my disclosure of my research orientation and through the provision of rich descriptions that highlighted the focus of the study. I was cognisant of the possible impact of my own frame of reference and my own worldview. In order to ensure that the findings presented were consistent with the ten original research articles, effort was made to continually refer back to the articles during the interpretation process.

Through the use of triangulation, which included gathering information from various sources, using multiple methods of data analysis, and basing the analysis on multiple theories and interpretations, credibility of the study was ensured. Furthermore to ensure that information was obtained from multiple sources I conducted a literature review and made use of ten original research articles, my own meta-observations based on the reading and re-reading of the ten original articles and engaged in dialogue with the study's supervisors. I thus remained constantly aware of the existence of multiple interpretations. These processes allowed me to honour the constructions and perspectives of the ten original articles, her supervisors, as well as the contributions of previous research and to integrate these into the study.

Female sexual offenders cannot be studied in isolation. Thus, in order to determine female sexual offenders' behavioural and contextual characteristics, it is important to consider their behaviour in relation to their victims as well as in relation

to the context in which this behaviour occurs. This approach corresponds to the research question as well as to the definition of behavioural and contextual factors as provided in Chapter One.

Thus, the three main themes that emerged during the thematic content analysis may have an influence on the other themes and sub-themes, and thus these themes should not be seen in isolation. The themes that have been identified are the following: personal characteristics of the female sexual offender, behavioural characteristics of the female sexual offender, and contextual characteristics of the female sexual offender. These identified themes and subthemes are illustrated in Figure 4.1 on the following page.

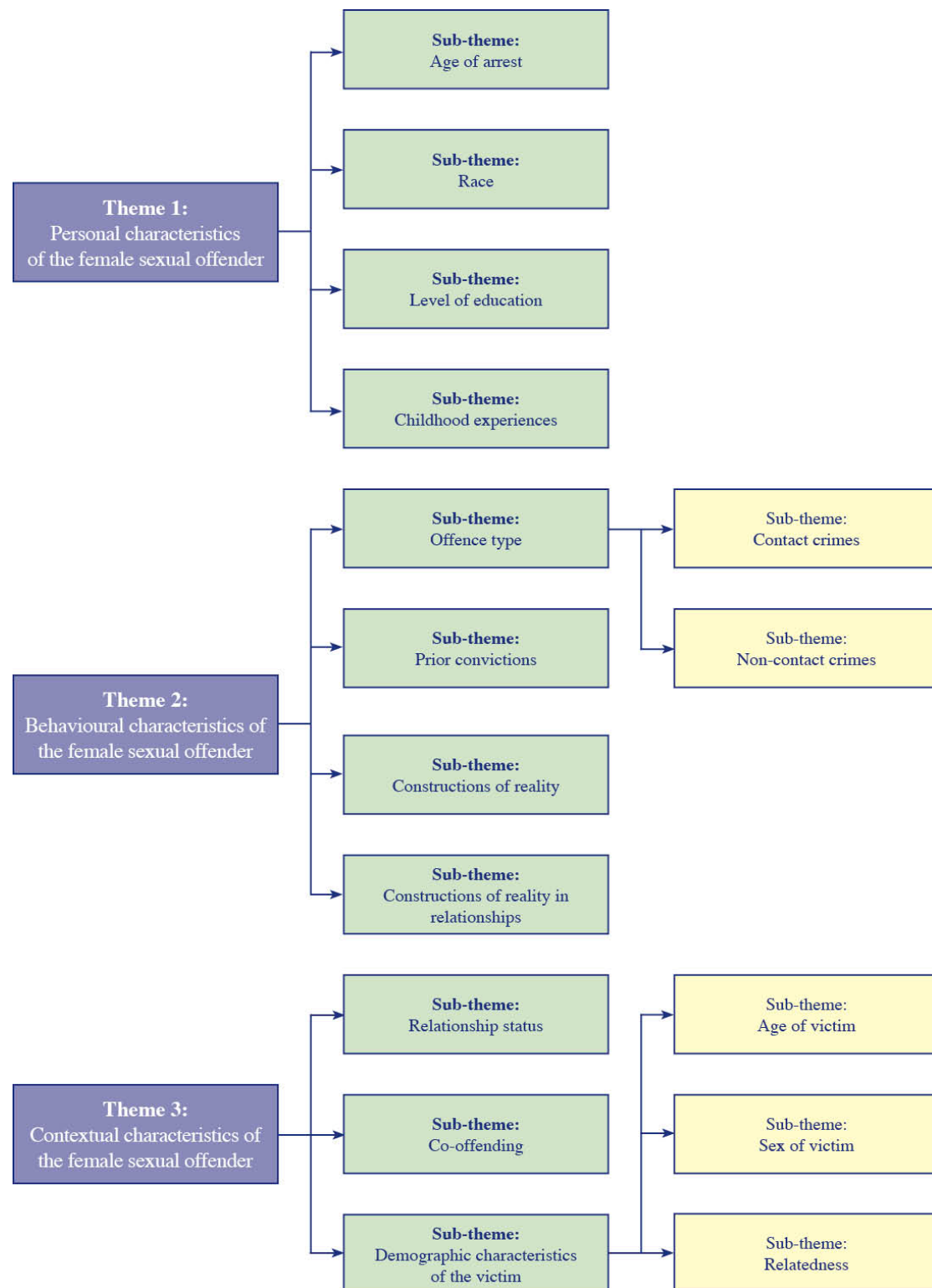


Figure 4.1. Flow chart representing identified themes and their sub-themes.

Within each of the themes, I present the findings in an interpretative manner. Thereafter, each theme is described. This process corresponds to the research paradigm used, namely social constructionism. Each of the themes that emerged from the data is then discussed by using examples and direct quotations taken from the original research articles. The similarities and differences of each research article are discussed. Thereafter, the themes and sub-themes are described with reference to the theories and literature discussed in Chapter Two.

### **Research Articles**

As previously mentioned in Chapter One and Three, ten research articles are analysed using thematic content analysis. Table 1 to 10 below provides a concise description of the content of each of the ten research articles, including the objectives of the study, data collection and analysis methods, sample or population description, and the main findings and limitations of the study. The ten research articles chosen are included in this study as they match the inclusion criteria of the study as set out in Chapter Three. The tables that follow provide an overview of the ten original research articles that were collected as data in this study.



Table 1

*Summary of the findings of research article 1 - Vandiver and Walker (2002). Female sex offenders: An overview and analysis of 40 cases. Criminal Justice Review, 27(2), 284-300.*

Information Area	Description
Objectives	To identify offending patterns in developing a typology.
	To identify basic characteristics of female sexual offenders to develop a classification system.
Data collection and analysis	Data was collected from state and FBI records, and included all sex offenders registered in Arkansas as of 1 February 1999.
	Comparisons between male and female offenders included a chi-square analysis and a Fisher's exact test for the nominal-level variable and a non-parametric test.
	A Mann-Whitney U test was used for all interval/ratio variables.
Sample description	The initial data set consisted of 1644 sex offenders– from that set 40 were female (n = 40).
	The rest were male, and all 40 were included.
Findings	A typical profile of a female sexual offender in Arkansas was Caucasian between 19 and 25 years old.
	The typical offence history included only one sex offence (usually rape or first-degree sexual abuse, which was also the offender's first recorded offence).
	Arrests occurred in Arkansas.
Limitations	This study did not indicate whether the female sexual offenders were acting alone or with a co-offender. In addition to this, other situational factors and psychological factors associated with female sexual offenders were not examined.
	The research was conducted on a small sample.
	Sources of female sex offenders did not include broad measures such as arrest records.

Table 2

*Summary of the findings of research article 2 - Nathan and Ward (2002). Female sex offenders: Clinical and demographic features. Journal of Sexual Aggression: An International, Interdisciplinary Forum for Research, Theory and Practice, 8(1), 5-21.*

Information Area	Description
<b>Objectives</b>	To provide a detailed analysis of 12 female sexual offenders in the correctional system of Victoria, Australia.
	To determine whether the characteristics of the offenders in the system of Victoria were consistent with existing knowledge about female sex offenders.
<b>Data collection and analysis</b>	An analysis of the responses was generated from sentencing comments, structured clinical interviews (individual), and MMPI-2 results.
<b>Sample description</b>	Twelve female sexual offenders convicted of sexual offences against minors under the age of 16 years old were studied.
<b>Findings</b>	An analysis of the information revealed that the characteristics of these women and their offences generally fitted the profile of female sexual offenders as found in the literature.
	The findings also indicated that females differed in some aspects when compared to the typical profile of the female sexual offender.
	Although the majority of women had male co-offenders, only a few females appeared to be coerced and motivated by fear.
<b>Limitations</b>	Although the findings of this study were consistent with previous research, there should be further research conducted to verify their findings.

Table 3

*Summary of findings of research article 3 - Vandiver and Kercher (2004). Offender and victim characteristics of registered female sexual offenders in Texas: A proposed typology of female sexual offenders. A Journal of Research and Treatment, 16(2), 121-137.*

Information Area	Description
Objectives	To determine and assess the relationship that exists amongst the characteristics of female sexual offenders and their victims.
	To assess the complex interaction of the variables through cluster analysis to produce a typology of female sexual offenders.
Data collection and analysis	The data was collected from two sources: the Texas Department of Public Safety's (DPS) sex offender registry and the criminal history division of the Texas DPS.
	Hierarchical log linear modelling and cluster analysis were used to assess the relationship between the offender and victim characteristics.
Sample description	All adult female sex offenders found on the Texas sex offender registry since 1994 to 2001 were included.
	N=471
Findings	There is a complex relationship between offender and victim characteristics.
	Identification of the preferred victim is mitigated by more than one variable.
	The most common group includes 146 offenders – the heterosexual nurturer.
	The heterosexual nurturer group was the least likely to have an arrest for a sexual assault, and they have male victims with an average age of 12 years old.
	Other types of offenders included non-criminal homosexual offenders, female sexual predators, young adult child exploiters, homosexual criminals, and aggressive homosexual offenders.
Limitations	Limitations to this research included the scope of characteristics included in the analysis and the sources of the data.
	The researchers mention that the variables included in this analysis were limited to those maintained in the sex offender registration data.
	Such data could have excluded many situational characteristics such as if the female was acting alone or with another offender.
	By relying only on a criminal justice population, only those females who were arrested, convicted, or received deterred adjudication were included in the researched population.

Table 4

*Summary of findings of research article 4 - Christopher, Lutz-Zois, and Reinhardt (2007). Female sexual offenders: Personality pathology as a mediator of the relationship between childhood sexual abuse history and sexual abuse perpetration against others. Child Abuse and Neglect, 31(1), 871-883.*

Information Area	Description
Objectives	The goal was to examine possible mechanisms for the relationship between a history of childhood sexual abuse and the likelihood of perpetrating sexual abuse as an adult.
	The second goal was to examine whether the nature of a woman's own history of child sexual abuse (for example, duration and her relationship to the abuser) is associated with perpetration of sexual abuse of children.
Data collection and analysis	Participants completed measures that included a child history of sexual abuse (The childhood trauma questionnaire [CTQ]), socially desirable responding (balanced inventory of desirable responding), primary and secondary psychopathy (Levenson's self-report psychopathy scale), and borderline personality disorder tendencies (borderline subscale of the schizotypal questionnaire).
Sample description	142 female participants (61 sex offenders and 81 non-sex offenders) that had been incarcerated as of 2007 were included.
Findings	This study replicated previous research conducted on all male samples suggesting that the nature of sexual abuse suffered in childhood is an important variable in predicting future sexual abuse perpetration.
Limitations	A limitation of this study was limiting the research to a prison sample.
	This also means that the results could not be generalised to all female sexual offenders.
	Data collection methods may have been limited to only those offenders who could read and understand items on a questionnaire.
	Another limitation is the extent to which these offenders answered the questionnaires truthfully.

Table 5

*Summary of findings of research article 5 – Lawson (2008). Female sex offenders' relationship experiences. Violence and Victims, 23(3), 331-343.*

Information Area	Description
Objectives	To provide a description of the everyday life from the offender's point of view.
Data collection and analysis	Twenty records complied by the Sex Offender Screening and Risk Assessment Program for assessing the risk of offenders within the community was used.
	The study used inductive content analysis and Atlas.ti software.
Sample description	Twenty records of Female Sexual Offenders from the Risk Assessment Program were used.
Findings	The global theme that emerged was relationship experience.
	The offenders described the quality of their relationship experiences, including their personal perspectives, intimate relationships, and social lives.
	These descriptions could have implications for treatment planning and future research regarding women who have molested children.
Limitations	The study addressed only female sex offenders who had already been arrested and convicted and who were required to register. Therefore excluding other populations such as clinical samples.
	The data was collected in a coercive environment, which was done for the purpose of risk assessment.
	The sample size that was used was small and therefore may limit generalisability.

Table 6

*Summary of findings of research article 6 - Beech, Parrett, Ward, and Fischer (2009).*

Assessing female sexual offenders' motivations and cognitions: An exploratory study.

*Psychology, Crime and Law, 15(2), 201-216.*

Information Area	Description
Objectives	To determine if the motivational schemas that underlie male sexual offenders' cognitions could be identified in female sexual offenders.
Data collection and analysis	Semi-structured interviews were used.
	Qualitative analysis was used.
Sample description	Fifteen incarcerated female sexual offenders (nearly 50% of the current UK female sexual offender population) were examined.
Findings	Four of the five motivational schemas (uncontrollability, dangerous world, children as sexual objects, and the nature of harm) suggested by Ward (2000) to underlie male sexual offenders' cognitions, could be clearly identified in women.
Limitations	A limitation in this study was that the number of participants that were interviewed was small, which may affect generalisability.
	A second limitation was that not all the offenders were included in this study as some refused contact with the researchers.
	The third limitation was the poor reliability for one item, namely the nature of harm. The researchers raised questions about the robustness of the coding of this particular item.

Table 7

*Summary of findings of research article 7- Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009).*

Female sexual offenders: A controlled comparison of offender and victim/crime characteristics. *Journal of Family Violence*, 24(1), 367-376.

Information Area	Description
Objectives	To do a chart review of female sexual offenders, male sexual offenders, male violent offenders, and female violent offenders.
Data collection and analysis	<p>The case files that were available to the West Virginia Department of Corrections staff and law enforcement officials were used.</p> <p>Analysis of Variance (ANOVAs) as well as chi-squared power analyses were used.</p>
Sample description	<p>Thirty one female sex offenders, 31 male sex offenders, 31 female violent offenders, and 31 male violent offenders were studied.</p> <p>Female and male offenders in the non-sex offender comparison group had to have committed a victim-involved offence (for example, robbery, assault, or malicious wounding.)</p>
Findings	<p>The multiple variables appeared related to gender and crime.</p> <p>Some of the variables emerged as female sexual offender-specific, such as they reported less alcohol abuse history, had fewer admissions of guilt, usually knew their victims, and were biologically related to their victims.</p> <p>These offenders were not discriminatory with regard to their victim's gender, and they had the highest incidence of sexual victimisation.</p>
Limitations	<p>Limitations of this study included that the data was collected using a chart review and that the data in the chart review had not been collected in a standardised manner.</p> <p>The use of a prison sample could be problematic as it excluded the less serious offenders who may have received community placement.</p>

Table 8

*Summary of findings of research article 8 - Elliot, Eldridge, Ashfield, and Beech* (2010). Exploring risk: Potential static, dynamics, protective and treatment factors in the clinical histories of female sex offenders. *Journal of Family Violence*, 25(6), 595-602.

Information Area	Description
Objectives	To examine the potential risk factors, protective factors, and treatment needs that are highlighted through the process of clinical interventions and assessments of female sexual offenders with a view to indicate the extent to which these factors may be prevalent within the population.
Data collection and analysis	Analysis of clinical files for all female sexual offender clients referred between 1998 and 2007 was used. Content analysis was also used.
Sample description	Forty three adult females who were referred to the Lucy Faithful Foundation (LFF) on the basis of a criminal conviction or family court legal findings and/or admissions relating to child sexual abuse were included.
Findings	The study described how female sex offenders typically display clinical deficits in the same risk domains as males, while noting the manner in which these deficits manifested in this population.
Limitations	The data that was used was collected from clinical files which were secondary sources of information using psychological and psychiatric reports. Therefore, there was a heavy reliance on the quality of these reports. The sample size was small, which made it difficult to translate these findings to the wider population of female sexual offenders.



Table 9

*Summary of findings of research article 9 - Muskens, Bogaerts, Van Casteren, and Labrijn (2011). Adult female sexual offending: A comparison between co-offenders and solo offenders in a Dutch sample. Journal of Sexual Aggression, 17(1), 46-60.*

Information Area	Description
Objectives	To explore the personality pathology amongst female solo offenders and co-offenders.
	To examine sexual violence and any recidivism rates amongst these female sexual offenders.
Data collection and analysis	The study was coded from the file information of female sexual offenders that were referred to Netherlands Institute of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology for inpatient and outpatient psychiatric and psychological evaluations between January 1999 and December 2008.
	Statistical analysis was conducted.
Sample description	Sixty convicted adult female sexual offenders who were referred for inpatient or outpatient psychiatric and/or psychological evaluations were included.
Findings	The mean number of DSM-IV Axis I disorders was larger amongst solo offenders than the number of these disorders present amongst co-offenders.
	DSM-IV personality disorders were more prevalent amongst co-offenders when compared to solo offenders.
Limitations	The solo offenders and co-offenders were divided inadequately, and thus the solo offenders represented a small number.
	The sample in the study consisted of convicted offenders only. Therefore, the sample did not represent the entire female sexual offender population.
	The sample only included a selective group of sexual offenders who received psychiatric and/or psychological evaluations, and, as a result, it is likely that the prevalence of psychiatric and personality disorders was more prominent amongst the selected sample.
	The data that was used in this study was obtained from reports of psychiatric and psychological reports.
	The quality of these reports may have affected the data as some of these reports did not provide comprehensive information on all the participants as some data was missing.

Table 10

*Summary of findings of research article 10 - Wijkman, Bijleveld and Hendricks, (2011). Female sex offenders: Specialists, generalists and once-off offenders. Journal of Sexual Aggression, 17(1), 34-45.*

Information Area	Description
<b>Objectives</b>	To examine the criminal careers of all female sex offenders prosecuted by the criminal justice authorities in the Netherlands from 1994 to 2005.
	The researchers set out to explore the extent to which adult female sexual offenders specialised in sexual offending and to what extent they could be categorised as generalists.
	In addition, the researchers wanted to explore whether specialisation and generalistic offending patterns were associated with personal and offence characteristics.
<b>Data collection and analysis</b>	Criminal prosecution cases registered between 1994 and 2005 with the Netherlands Central Prosecution Service involving adult female defendants of at least one sexual offence were included.
	Latent class analysis was used.
<b>Sample description</b>	One hundred and thirty five adult females who were registered for at least one hands-on sexual offence were included.
	Three hundred and thirty seven female sexual offenders that were hands-off only offenders prosecuted for human trafficking were included.
<b>Findings</b>	Three subgroups of female sexual offenders were established:
	1) Once-off offenders who committed one sexual act and who had no other offences were identified.
	2) Generalist sexual offenders with sexual offending and more serious offences were identified with the following characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being more likely to have been physically maltreated in childhood;</li> <li>• having a significantly longer criminal career that starts earlier in life;</li> <li>• belonging to an ethnic minority;</li> <li>• using drugs more frequently; and</li> <li>• being more criminally active than specialists.</li> </ul>

	3) Specialist sexual offenders with many sexual offences and some minor offences were identified with the following characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• larger number of women classified in this group;</li> <li>• more likely to have a co-offender;</li> <li>• offend against both sexes;</li> <li>• usually offend against acquainted victims; and</li> <li>• experience more sexual abuse during childhood.</li> </ul>
	Women in these categories differ in characteristics such as victimisation, alcohol abuse, and the sex of the victim.
<b>Limitations</b>	This study did not consider the motive of the female sexual offender and their co-offenders, or the interaction between the offenders.

### Themes Related to Female Sexual Offenders

#### Theme One: Personal Characteristics of the Female Sexual Offender

Theme one covers the personal characteristics of the female sexual offender. These characteristics have been included as a theme because they can be used to provide a behavioural and contextual understanding (as defined in Chapter One) of female sexual offending. Information regarding personal characteristics may also add to the existing knowledge of typologies as proposed by Mathew et al. (1991) and Harris (2010). These typologies and the value of these typologies are discussed in Chapter Two under the heading ‘Typology of female sexual offenders’.

**Sub-theme: Age of arrest.** The majority of the studies analysed, namely the studies conducted by Elliot et al. (2010), Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009), Lawson (2008), Nathan and Ward (2002), Vandiver and Kercher (2004), Vandiver and Walker (2002), and Wijkman et al. (2011), found that the average age of the female sexual offender at the time of arrest ranges from 30 to 35 years old. In contrast Christopher et al. (2007) and Muskens et al. (2011) found that the female sexual offender is older than 35 years old at the time of arrest. Research conducted by Beech et al. (2009) did not mention the age of the female sexual offender at the time of

arrest. These findings are contrary to Vandiver's (2006) findings that indicate that the average age of arrest of the female sexual offender is 26 years old. This possibility was also indicated in Johansson Love and Fremouw's (2009) study.

Although most of these studies analysed explore the female sexual offender's age at the time of arrest, this information does not give an indication of the age of the female sexual offender, the first time she engaged in sexual abuse; the duration of the sexual abuse, nor does it indicate the period of time between when the sexual offence is reported and when the offender is arrested for the sexual offence. Thus, it is possible that the sexual offence occurred for the first time when the female sexual offender was younger.

Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) state the following "The first conviction age, however, may not equal the first time that they had engaged in this type of criminal behaviour, but the first time that they were caught and prosecuted" (p.372). These researchers further mention that

... it is possible that sexual offenders and female sexual offenders in particular, engage in crimes for which they are less likely to be apprehended such as crimes against children they know and with whom they have a relationship and who are intimidated to stay silent. (p.372)

Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) quote, as stated above, indicates that the relationship of the female sexual offender to the victim may affect the victim's willingness to report the sexual abuse. Therefore, the age of the arrest of the female sexual offender may be different to the age in which the female sexual offender first committed the sexual abuse.

The presence of a co-offender also seems to have an impact on the findings of the age of the female sexual offender at the time of arrest. In Christopher et al.'s

(2007) study, they found that when a co-offender was present, the female sexual offender was generally slightly older than solo offenders at the time of arrest.

Johansson-Love and Fremouw's (2009) study indicate that the following would be important: "Future research should attempt to examine the age at the time of the first sexual offences (detected or undetected) through anonymous data collection with the female sex offender population instead of using conviction data" (p.373). This type of information might be more efficiently gained by using different research methods, such as in-depth interviews. I believe that the age of the female sexual offender at the time of arrest could contribute to a better understanding of female sexual offenders in relation to co-offending, the onset of deviant behaviour, and the duration of the sexual abuse. The majority of the studies analysed (Elliot et al., 2010; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011), found that the average age of the female sexual offender at the time of arrest is between 30 to 35 years old. Two studies (Christopher et al., 2007; Muskens et al., 2011) that were analysed found that the female sexual offender is older than 35 years old at the time of arrest. One study (Beech et al., 2009) did not mention the age of the female sexual offender at the time of arrest.

**Sub-theme: Race.** Six studies, namely the studies conducted by Beech et al. (2009), Christopher et al. (2007), Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009), Lawson (2008), Vandiver and Kercher (2004), and Vandiver and Walker (2002), found that female sexual offenders are usually Caucasian. This finding corresponds to previous research, such as Vandiver's (2006) study as discussed under the heading 'Characteristics of the female sexual offender' in Chapter Two. The remaining studies, namely the studies conducted by Elliot et al. (2010), Muskens et al. (2011),

Nathan and Ward (2002), and Wijkman et al. (2011), found that the race of the offenders is generally unspecified and unknown. The finding that female sexual offenders are mainly Caucasian is consistent with previous research as discussed under the heading 'Characteristics of the female sexual offender' in Chapter Two. I believe that the race of the female sexual offender may be an important variable to consider when conducting future research as many sexual offences may be hidden as a result of cultural practices or certain populations may be more vulnerable to female sexual offenders. In this study the majority of the studies (Beech et al., 2009; Christopher et al., 2007; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002) indicated that female sexual offenders are usually Caucasian. The remaining four studies (Elliot et al., 2010; Muskens et al., 2011; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011), found that the race of the offenders is generally unspecified and unknown.

**Sub-theme: Level of education.** In five of the studies analysed, namely the studies conducted by Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009), Muskens et al. (2011), Nathan and Ward (2002), Vandiver and Walker (2002), and Wijkman et al. (2011), it was found that these offenders have generally completed less than a high school qualification. Wijkman et al.'s (2011) study also mentions the fact that this finding "... is exceptionally low for the Netherlands" (p.39). These researchers found that "... 42% had below average or borderline intellectual level" (Wijkman et al., 2011, p.39). These results were obtained by administering a psychometric test namely, the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale to the female sexual offenders (Wijkman et al., 2011).

Johansson-Love and Fremouw's (2009) study found that the lower level of education found in female sexual offenders is contrary to the level of education found

in male sexual offenders. In this case, the researchers revealed that male sexual offenders have either a high school degree or General Educational Development (GED) (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009). Therefore, male sexual offenders, in general, appear to have a higher education level than female sexual offenders. In Christopher et al.'s (2007) study, it was found that the female sexual offender generally has less than a formal education. Four of the studies, namely the studies conducted by Beech et al. (2009), Elliot et al. (2010), Vandiver and Kercher (2004), and Vandiver and Walker (2002), did not analyse the female sexual offenders' level of education. In half of the studies that were analysed (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Muskens et al., 2011; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Walker, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011) it was found that female sexual offenders generally have less than a high school qualification.

**Subtheme: Childhood experiences.** In five of the studies analysed, namely the studies conducted by Christopher et al. (2007), Elliot et al. (2010), Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009), Nathan and Ward (2002), and Wijkman et al. (2011), it was found that the female sexual offenders studied had some history of sexual abuse. This finding corresponds to research conducted by Ward and Hudson (1998), Davis (2006), and Harris (2010) which indicate that female sexual offenders usually come from dysfunctional family backgrounds which often includes sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Childhood victimisation with regard to female sexual offenders is further discussed in Chapter Two under the heading of 'Childhood victimisation. In addition to the sexual abuse, Nathan and Ward (2002) and Wijkman et al. (2011) found that the female sexual offenders studied had a childhood history of physical abuse as well as domestic violence. This finding also corresponds with the findings of Mathews et al. (1991), Miccio-Fonseca (2000), and Terry (2006) as

discussed under the subheading of ‘Characteristics of the female sexual offender’, namely ‘Mental Status of the Female Sexual Offender’ in Chapter Two, which indicates that female sexual offenders are more likely to be abused by someone that they know or a family member. Crawford (2009) further found that sexual abuse committed by females usually stemmed from fear, coercion, and loneliness. Experiences during female sexual offenders’ childhood years is further discussed in Chapter Two under the subheading of ‘Characteristics of the female sexual offender’, namely ‘Mental Status of the Female Sexual Offender’.

Elliot et al.’s (2010) study showed that parental relationships are also an important indicator for predisposing females to sexual offending. This study revealed that 49% of female sexual offenders studied reported poor attachments styles, 51% reported parental rejection and/or neglect during childhood, 67% reported child abuse, and 42% reported emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse (Elliot et al., 2010). Furthermore, Elliot et al.’s (2010) study revealed that “... 42 % of the sample reported having been a victim of sexual abuse during their childhood. Of these, 10 had been abused solely by intra-familial perpetrators, four solely by extra-familial offenders and four by a combination” (p.598). This finding corresponds with Harris’ (2010) ‘Level II: Single-Factor Theories’ as discussed in Chapter Two which, specifies that childhood victimisation is an individual vulnerability factor which may predispose a female towards sexually offending. Childhood sexual abuse was further indicated by Harris’s (2010), Micro-Level Theories which seek to explain why female sexual offenders sexually abuse. Childhood victimisation of female sexual offenders is discussed further in Chapter Two under the heading of ‘Level III: Micro-Level Theories’.



Christopher et al.'s (2007) study revealed that participants in the sexual offender group reported "more frequent instances" (p. 880) of childhood sexual abuse. I believe that the term 'more frequent instances' is very vague and does not adequately describe the incidents of childhood sexual abuse. However, it gives an indication of the presence of childhood sexual abuse experience. Christopher et al. (2007) also indicate that childhood sexual abuse is often associated with borderline personality disorder tendencies in adulthood, but not with primary and secondary psychopathy. The term primary psychopathy refers to an internal deficit which prevents individuals from self-regulation and normal functioning (Newman, MacCoon, Vaughn, & Sadeh, 2005). Whereas secondary psychopathy refers to the inadequate results of a compromised intelligence, psychotic processes, neurotic anxiety, increased sexual drive or other attributes that increase an individual's vulnerability towards deviant behaviour (Newman et al., 2005).

The duration of childhood sexual abuse was discussed by Christopher et al.'s (2007) study which demonstrated that the duration of the abuse appears to be an important indicator of female sexual offending. These researchers found that the experience of childhood sexual abuse alone is not enough to predict sexual offending, but instead, the duration of such abuse is a stronger indicator (Christopher et al., 2007). It was found that females in the sexual offender group studied suffered from longer periods of sexual abuse than non-sexual offenders (Christopher et al., 2007). Christopher et al.'s (2007) study revealed that

... specially it stands to reason that the greater exposure a child has to such acts of violence, the more likely they are to view sexual relationships with children as 'normal' and to model these actions when the opportunity presents itself. (p.880)

The female sexual offender's experience of childhood sexual abuse may be considered to be connected to the idea of the victim identifying with the aggressor (Saradjian, 2010) as discussed in Chapter Two under the heading of 'Impact of Female Sexual Abuse on the Victim', subsection 'Powerlessness'. Johansson-Love and Fremouw's (2009) study found that victims of childhood sexual abuse of both male and female sexual offenders report significantly more experiences of childhood sexual victimisation than other groups of offenders. However, there appeared to be no significant relationship between membership regarding the sexual offender group versus the non-sexual offender group as well as the type of relationship between the participant and the perpetrator who sexually abused them during childhood (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009).

According to Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009), "... it is suggested that identifying and treating victims of sexual abuse may be a point for intervention/prevention for sex offenders, as these results appear to support a cycle of sexual abuse" (p.373). In this study it was found that half of studies (Christopher et al., 2007; Elliot et al., 2010; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011) analysed in this research indicated that female sexual offenders usually have some history of sexual abuse. The other half (Beech et al., 2009; Lawson, 2008; Muskens et al., 2011; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002) of these studies did not specify whether the female sexual offender had a history of childhood sexual abuse.

## **Theme Two: Behavioural Characteristics of the Female Sexual Offender**

As defined in Chapter One, 'behaviour' refers to a way of behaving oneself. The manner in which an individual behaves or conducts oneself is indicative of an individual's impulses, motivations, wishes and drives, and instincts and cravings

(Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Thus, behaviour is something that reflects impulses, motivations and can be observed. The term 'behavioural' entails behaviour that is related to the acts or omissions of particular behaviour (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). In this study, theme two refers to the offence type-contact crimes, non-contact crimes, prior convictions, construction of reality and constructions of reality in a relationship.

**Subtheme: The offence type – contact crimes.** Contact crimes refer to sexual abuse where the female sexual offender has made physical contact with the victim such as penetration or oral sex or 'hands on' offences. Six of the studies (Beech et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2010; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002) found that sexual offences committed by female sexual offenders are mainly contact crimes. These crimes include rape or first-degree sexual abuse, incest, sexual penetration as well as gross indecency (Beech et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2010; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002). The type of offence has an implication for both sentencing as well as impact on the victim. It may further have an impact on the treatment programmes for the victim. According to Nathan and Ward's (2002) study, sexual offences committed by solo offenders and co-offenders differ. These researchers found that sexual penetration occurs more frequently amongst co-offenders (Nathan & Ward, 2002). Nathan and Ward (2002) found that more force is involved in offences committed by co-offenders and that co-offenders are more likely to use substances such as sedatives on their victims to ensure compliance. The above findings are contrary to Vandiver's (2006) study as discussed in Chapter Two under the heading 'Types of Sexual Abuse Committed by Females'. Vandiver's (2006) study indicates that female sexual offenders usually commit a broad range of sexual abuse acts which include both 'hands-on' and 'hands-off' offences. Vandiver's

(2006) study does not provide an exact amount of which of the offences were ‘hands on’ and which were ‘hands off’ offences.

However, the seriousness of the offences described in Nathan and Wards’ (2002) study may appear to give the incorrect impression that female sexual offenders commit more serious sexual violations than other sexual offenders because most of the data in these studies was collected from prison samples. The impact of using only prison samples is that only the more serious sexual offences that result in prison sentences are represented. The use of conducting research using a prison sample of female sexual offenders was also consistent with the limitations in the research conducted on female sexual offending as discussed in Chapter Two under the heading ‘Types of Sexual Abuse Committed by Females’. In this analysis of the ten research articles in the majority of studies analysed it was found that female sexual offenders usually commit contact crimes.

**Sub-theme: Non-contact crimes.** Non-contact crimes refer to sexual abuse where the female sexual offender has not made physical contact with the victim. Examples of such crimes are the following: possessing photography of children, aiding and abetting rape, promoting child prostitution, promoting child exposure, and compelling prostitution (Beech et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2010; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). Three of six of the studies that were analysed (Beech et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2010; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004) found that non-contact crimes are more likely to be committed by female sexual offenders than other offenders.

Four of the studies that were analysed did not mention which type of offences (contact or non-contact crimes) were committed (Christopher et al., 2007; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Muskens et al., 2011; Wijkman et al., 2011). Six of the studies (Beech et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2010; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002;

Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002) found that contact crimes were more common while three (Beech et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2010; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004) of the studies found that non-contact crimes were more common. Therefore there was no definitive conclusion regarding the type of crime.

**Subtheme: Prior convictions.** Prior convictions refer to any previous criminal charges that a female sexual offender has committed prior to her being charged with the sexual offence. Nathan and Ward (2002), Beech et al. (2009), and Elliot et al. (2010) found that all of the female sexual offenders studied had prior non-sexual offences. According to Elliot et al.'s (2010) study,

[w]hen assessing adult MSO [male sexual offender], a key historical marker is previous convictions of sexual, violent and other types of offending. However for female offenders, it is important to consider other markers such as findings of fact in the family courts, previous serious allegations, and local authority concerns about risk to children. (p.601)

According to Elliot et al. (2010), “[o]nly 5% of the sample was found to have previous sexual offences” (p.601). This is in line with previous research conducted by Giguere and Bumby (2007) and Vandiver (2006) which indicate female sexual offenders usually have less legal problems or contact with the legal system prior to the sexual offence charge. This is further discussed under the heading ‘Comparing Female and Male Sexual Offenders’ Characteristics’ in Chapter Two. However, according to Wijkman et al.'s (2011) study, it was found that some of these female sexual offender cases were dismissed for reasons such as the offender starting therapy or the offender paying the victim for the damages caused (Wijkman et al., 2011). These are similar findings to Vandiver (2006), Giguere and Bumby (2007), Travin et al. (1990) and Kramer (2010) as discussed in Chapter Two under the heading of

‘Underreporting of Female Sexual Offender’, subsection professional bias. The finding as discussed in Chapter Two suggest the professionals are often more lenient on female sexual offenders than male sexual offenders. Wijkman et al.’s (2011) findings demonstrate that legal professionals may be more lenient towards female sexual offenders than male sexual offenders. In this study it was found that three of the studies that were analysed, namely Nathan and Ward (2002), Beech et al. (2009), and Elliot et al. (2010) indicated that the female sexual offenders had prior non-sexual offences. The remaining seven research articles (Christopher et al., 2007; Johansson-Love, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Muskens et al., 2011; Vandiver & Walker, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Wijkman et al., 2011) that were analysed did not mention whether the female sexual offender had prior convictions or not.

**Subtheme: Construction of reality.** Construction of reality could be seen as the manner in which a person constructs a particular reality, this is often reflected in the female sexual offender’s thought patterns or processes (Harris, 2010). Harris (2010) refers to these a construction of reality as cognitive distortions. Half of the studies that were analysed, namely Beech et al. (2009), Elliot et al. (2010), Lawson (2009) and Muskens et al. (2011) and Nathan and Ward (2002) mentioned constructions of reality. Two studies, namely, Elliot et al.’s (2010) study and Muskens et al.’s (2011) study revealed information on the types of cognitive distortions reported by female sexual offenders. These studies revealed the following five constructs of reality: children as sexual beings, nature of harm, entitlement, dangerous world construct and the uncontrollability construct (Elliot et al., 2010; Muskens et al., 2011). These two studies also found that the ‘dangerous world construct’ and the ‘uncontrollability construct’ as discussed in Chapter Two were less common, except amongst solo offenders (Elliot et al., 2010; Muskens et al., 2011).

According to Elliot et al. (2010), "...the most common distortion relates to the offender imbuing the child with adult characteristics" (p.599). This study revealed that the female sexual offenders studied, constructed a reality where the child was a sexual being, and thus phrases such as the following were recorded in the report: "...the child's ability to consent to sexual activity" (p. 600), "... the victim experiences some level of enjoyment from the abuse." (p.599), and "... own needs above the child" (p.599). This may indicate that the child's needs are disregarded and the female sexual offender uses the child in order to satisfy her own needs. Elliot et al. (2010) also revealed that "... women in the co-offender group frequently placed their partners' needs above the child's" (p.599). Elliot et al. (2010) also report that

... for the lone offenders' group this manifests as a feeling that sexual contact was justified because their own needs came before the needs of the child, whereas in the co-offender groups this belief manifested as a feeling that sexual contact was justified because their partner's needs came before the needs of the child. (p.601)

Beech et al.'s (2009) study mentions that the female sexual offenders who saw children as sexual objects (these offenders constituted 47% of the sample) "...saw [the] victim as an adult rather than a child and stated that they looked older for their age and behaved in a mature manner" (p. 207). These offenders also believed the children to have "... functioned as a sexual agent who were competent to make their own decisions about having sex with adults" (Beech et al., 2009, p. 207). According to Beech et al.'s (2009), the female sexual offender experienced the child as "...being sexually attracted or [were] aroused by the victims" (p.207) and expressed "... that in some cases this [arousal for the victim] revealed itself to be an expression of love for the victim" (p.207).

These offenders reportedly felt that "... victims enjoyed the sexual offending behaviour and actively sought to repeat the experience" (Beech et al., 2009, p. 208), and that "... victims found the experience pleasurable because they failed to report it to other adults or relevant authorities, and/or 'frequently initiated sexual contact'" (Beech et al., 2009, p. 208). Furthermore, the offenders were described as "... protecting the victim from further or more severe harm, for example, claiming that if she abused the victim then the abuse would stop on that occasion or that her co-perpetrator would not also abuse the child" (Beech et al., 2009, p. 208). These findings correspond to the literature review's discussion in Chapter Two under the heading 'Level II: Single-Factor Theories', subheading 'Cognitive distortions' which indicate that cognitive distortions are often reported by male sexual offenders (Harris, 2010). However, Ford (2010) found that many of the cognitive distortions reported by males were also found to be reported by females. Harris (2010) considers cognitive distortions to be a one of the individual vulnerability factors towards female sexual offending.

In Lawson's (2008) study these females often made use of the cognitive distortion that children are sexual beings, this meant that these female sexual offenders "... idealized children, demonized men, distrusted other women and expressed ambivalence about themselves" (Beech et al., 2009, p. 208). The offenders studied reportedly experienced "... children ... as giggly, playful and full of energy", whereas they regarded men as "... immature, lazy, pushy, and demanding" (Beech et al., 2009, p. 208). The offenders studied saw other women as "... commit[ting] adultery" (Beech et al., 2009, p. 208). The dangerous world constructs of the female sexual offender's reality revealed by Elliot et al.'s (2010) study were that female



sexual offenders experienced their world as dangerous and that a "... child is easier and/or safer than [being] with an adult"(p.599).

Beech et al.'s (2009) study found additional constructions of reality which they refer to as 'motivational schemas' (p. 201). These researchers, Beech et al.'s (2009), found that four of the five motivational schemas proposed by Ward (2009) to underlie male sexual offenders' cognitions may be identified in women who sexual offend. These four motivational schemas are the following: uncontrollability, dangerous world, children as sexual objects, and nature of harm (Beech et al., 2009). These schemas are discussed in Chapter Two under the heading 'Level II: Single-Factor Theories', subheading 'Cognitive distortions'. In Beech et al.'s (2009) study, 87% of the offenders had feelings of uncontrollability as they "...held the belief that they were not 'thinking straight' and that this placed them in a vulnerable position" (p.206). On the other hand Elliot et al.'s (2010) found that "... some participants believed that they were weak characters and were not strong enough to stop the abuse from occurring" (p.206). Therefore, Elliot et al.'s (2010) study indicate that the female sexual offender were not able to control the abuse rather than the idea that they were not thinking straight as indicated by Beech et al. (2009).

Where a co-offender was present, Beech et al. (2009) found that often the female "... located the cause of the abuse with their co-perpetrators or did not have knowledge of all that went on" (p.207). These females believed that the world was dangerous as indicated by Beech et al.'s (2009) finding, namely that the "... social environment of FSO [Female Sexual Offender] is viewed as menacing and the intentions of others malevolent and destructive" (p.207). Beech et al. (2009) also found that

... female sexual offenders' co-defendants (male) were viewed as violent and threatening individuals who actively orchestrated the offence. The participants reported being extremely fearful of their co-defendants and believed that if they did not join in they would become victims themselves (p.207).

Furthermore, Beech et al. (2009) found that the offenders studied held the following belief regarding the nature of harm (these offenders constituted 20% of the sample): "... it was alleged that abuse from the male co-offender would have been worse for the victim, and most likely would have resulted in greater suffering and long-term harm [for the victim]" (p.207). Nathan and Ward (2002) found that the majority of women studied experienced a sense of coercion that they described as being "... threatened with physical abuse if they did not comply" (p.16).

These findings were similar to the findings of Vandiver's (2006) typology of female sexual offending as discussed in Chapter Two under the heading 'Typologies of Female Sexual Offenders' subsection 'Women Who Have Co-offenders'. The women who have co-offenders group is further divided into the 'male accompanied familial' and 'male-accompanied non familial', these categories include female sexual offenders who have been coerced into sexual offence by a dominant male.

Feelings of revenge were also identified and were related to the following behaviours of the co-offenders: "... male co-offender had frequent sexual experiences with prostitutes and multiple consenting female partners" (Nathan & Ward, 2002, p.16).

In one case study in Nathan and Ward (2002) research, found that "one woman acknowledge[d] that she had done so to punish her partner for leaving her (her partner was the father of the daughter she offended against)" (Nathan & Ward, 2002, p.16). In another case study, it was reported that "...she wanted to teach her daughter

a lesson about being ‘boy mad’ and that she sought revenge on the males who had raped her in the past” (Nathan & Ward, 2002, p.16). Nathan and Ward (2002) found that “[t]wo female offenders reported that they sought to avenge their own childhood abuse” (p. 16). It was also specified that other female sexual offenders committed sexual offences “... to please their partners” (Nathan & Ward, 2002, p.16). Such findings were also found by Harris (2010) which indicates that often where there is an abusive dominant male that females are considered to act out of fear of physical punishment or further sexual assault. These findings are discussed in Chapter Two under the heading ‘Level II: Single-Factor Theories’ subsection ‘Coercion by a co-offender’.

However, in Nathan and Ward’s (2002) study, it was also found that “five women, three sole perpetrators and one accompanied, reported being motivated in part, by deviant sexual arousal” (p.7). Nathan and Ward (2002) also found that “... three women reported power as a motivating factor, one in an accompanied offence and two solo perpetrators” (p.7). In addition, “... three reported affection, as a motivating factor and two of these women were sole perpetrators” (Nathan & Ward, 2002, p.7). These female sexual offenders also placed much emphasis on past experiences (Nathan & Ward, 2002, p.7).

In this study the analysed research articles revealed that two studies, namely, Elliot et al.’s (2010) study and Muskens et al.’s (2011) found that female sexual offender’s use the following five constructs of reality: children as sexual beings, nature of harm, entitlement, dangerous world construct and the uncontrollability construct (Elliot et al., 2010; Muskens et al., 2011). These two studies also indicated that the dangerous world construct and the uncontrollability construct were less common, particularly amongst solo offenders (Elliot et al., 2010; Muskens et al.,

2011). Half of the studies (Beech et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2010; Lawson, 2008; Muskens et al., 2011; Nathan & Ward, 2002) that were analysed mentioned constructions of reality. The remaining five studies (Christopher et al., 2007; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011) did not mention constructions of reality.

**Subtheme: Constructions of reality in relationships.** The subtheme of constructions of reality could further be applied specifically to the female sexual offender's perception of her relationships. Lawson (2008) found that "[t]he ways that these female sexual offenders behaved in social relationships reduces their chances of meeting their physical and personal needs" (p.7). Although these female sexual offenders wanted to be intimate with others, they found that "[t]heir abilities to express intimacy, understanding, empathy and competency were limited." (Lawson, 2008, p.7). These women were also found to have "educational, marital and work histories [that] were unstable." (Lawson, 2008, p.7). Furthermore, it was found that their "... range of recreational activities was small." (Lawson, 2008, p.7). A lack of recreational activities may have led them to live relatively isolated lives. However, the findings of Lawson's (2008) are perceptions of the female sexual offender and have not been confirmed by additional research. Therefore, it is unclear whether this is an accurate reflection of the female sexual offenders' relationships.

It was also found that the "... interpersonal skills and personal capabilities [of female sexual offenders] were limited and as a result their opportunities for successfully meeting their commitments and responsibility were limited" (Lawson, 2008, p.7). This is comparable to research conducted by Mathew et al. (1991) and Miccio-Fonseca (2000) which indicate that both male sexual offenders and female sexual offenders report poor coping skills, relationship difficulties, as well as

cognitive distortions. This is further discussed in Chapter Two under the heading ‘Comparing Female and Male Sexual Offenders’ Characteristics’. Lawson (2008) also found that such offenders “... felt out of control of their lives and did not know why” (p.7). Lawson’s (2008) study found that when female sexual offenders were almost exclusively self-referential such as “... discussing [discussed] their offence ... they generally reported how it made them feel. When asked about the effect on themselves, [they] most often [spoke about the offence] in terms of what happened when they [were] caught” (p.7).

In contrast to other findings regarding childhood experiences Lawson (2008) found that these women believed that “[t]heir memories of childhood were generally positive, if not blissful-in stark contrast to their lives as adults” (p.7). Such female sexual offenders further “... believed people could not be trusted because of their characteristics and life challenges. These women felt that they were doing the best they could under very trying circumstances” (Lawson, 2008, p.7). Lawson (2008) also found that “... failure[s] were not their [the female sexual offender’s] fault, and they thought that they should be given credit for innate goodness” (p.7). In addition, Lawson’s (2008) study found that “the women in this study longed for a nurturing relationship, but their personal perspectives, intimate relationships and social lives did not support a satisfactory level of connectedness” (p.7). Lawson (2008) also mentions that

...when an offender tries to meet her personal, intimate and social needs, she should be encouraged to address her adult responsibilities rather than focusing exclusively on trying to feel better. Intervention should be to remediate offender’s deficits in social skills. Specific attention should be paid to how these women address the everyday concerns that face all adults, so that they

develop the skills needed to engage in responsible sexual and social behaviour.

(p.8)

Similar findings on intervention strategies were also found by Harris (2010) – these findings are discussed under the heading ‘Level III: Micro-level theories’ in Chapter Two. According to Beech et al. (2009), it appears that “... some comparisons and knowledge can be drawn from research carried out with male sexual offender. However, the results also suggested that female sexual offender should still be treated as a distinct group” (p.7). Furthermore, female sexual offenders “... interpret their lives and offending behaviour slightly differently to male sexual offender” (Beech et al., 2009, p.7). Similar findings were again found by Harris (2010) as discussed the heading of ‘Level I: Multi-Factor Theories’ as discussed in Chapter Two, which indicates that there are two pathways that may explain female sexual offending which include patriarchy and powerlessness and constructions of victimisation. These two pathways as suggested by Harris (2010) could influence the manner in which a female sexual offender interprets experience of her life.

### **Theme Three: Contextual Characteristics of the Female Sexual Offender**

As defined in Chapter One ‘contextual’ refers to something which is related to something else, or something that depends on something else (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Therefore, the surrounding circumstances refer to the context. From the above definitions, it appears that the terms ‘behavioural’ and ‘contextual’ are interlinked and therefore should not be seen in isolation. In this study the subthemes of relationship status, co-offending, demographic characteristics of the victims of female sexual offenders, age of victims, sex of victims and relatedness are discussed as follows:

**Sub-theme: Relationship status.** Relationship status refers to whether the female sexual offender was married or in a relationship at the time of committing the

sexual offence. Four of the studies that were analysed, namely the studies conducted by Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009), Lawson (2008), Nathan and Ward (2002), and Wijkman et al. (2011), found that the female sexual offender is usually either married or in a relationship at the time of committing a sexual offence. It is unclear in these four studies (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011) whether the female sexual offenders studied had co-offenders.

In addition to this finding in Lawson's (2008) study and Muskens et al.'s (2011) study distinguish between the relationship status of solo offenders and co-offenders. Muskens et al.'s (2011) study found that co-offenders are generally married (33.3%) and that solo offenders generally live with a partner (33.3%). However, the gender of the live-in partners in Muskens et al.'s (2011) study is unclear. The gender of the partners may be an important aspect to consider as it may affect the type of victims and the manner in which the sexual crimes are carried out. The relationship between the female sexual offender and her co-offender could also be linked with the idea of Doerner and Lab's (2012) wheel of psychological abuse and Herman's (1992) coercive control theory, which explains the process of psychological abuse that occurs within an abusive relationship as discussed in Chapter Two.

**Subtheme: Co-Offending.** Co-offending can be defined as another person who commits a criminal act with the female sexual offender, namely a co-offender. Four studies (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Muskens et al., 2011; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011) uncovered that the majority of female sexual offenders have co-offenders. Nathan and Ward (2002) found that the "majority [9] of woman co-offended, two of these women went on to initiate sexual abuse independently, and a minority [3] of women were sole perpetrators" (p.14). From

Nathan and Ward's (2002) sample of 12, it was found that in "... nine cases the co-offenders were male and in eight cases the co-offenders had a sexual relationship with the female perpetrator" (p.14). Nathan and Ward (2002) also found that "[i]n two of the convictions noted with co-offenders there was a de facto couple and a female co-offender" (p.14).

In Nathan and Ward's (2002) study, it was found that "[i]n five cases the mother in the couple co-offended against her children. In two of the five cases, the couple co-offended against her children. In four co-offender offences females victimized acquaintances" (Nathan & Ward, 2002, p.14). It also became apparent that

[o]f the offenders who offended with male co-offenders, two women sexually abused female victims in a self-initiating capacity. One of these sexually abused her daughter and another woman offended against a number of victims alone including the niece of her husband (Nathan & Ward, 2002, p.14).

Nathan and Ward (2002) also found that "... three of the nine women [who had co-offenders] had vaginal intercourse, and one woman had oral sex, with their male partners in front of the victim" (p.14). It is unclear which types of sexual abuse were committed by the remaining five female sexual offenders in Nathan and Ward's (2002) study. The types of sexual abuse committed by female sexual offenders are discussed in Chapter Two under the heading of 'Types of Sexual Abuse Committed by Females', which indicates that Female sexual offenders committed a wide range of sexual behaviour (Vandiver, 2006). Nathan and Ward's (2002) findings of types of behaviour committed by female sexual offenders are in line with Vandiver's (2006) description of 'hands-on sexual abuse' as discussed in Chapter Two under the heading of 'Types of Sexual Abuse Committed by Females'.



Wijkman et al. (2011) found that, of the 515 female sexual offenders who had a co-offender,

First, the presence of a co-offender fundamentally alters the setting in which the abuse is committed, so that issues of the dominance, fear and susceptibility may take precedence over sexual or violent motives. Secondly, ... the woman herself and their associations with the offence may become 'blurred' with those of her co-offender. (p.39)

Wijkman et al. (2011) also found such offenders to be "romantically involved with [a] co-offender" (p.39). Furthermore, Wijkman et al. (2001) found that 18% of these offenders studied had a partner that physically abused them, and one quarter reported having currently violent partners. These findings could also be linked to Herman's (1992) coercive control theory, which considers the psychological process of abuse within an intimate relationship as discussed in Chapter Two under the section of 'Theories Pertaining to Male-Coerced Female Sexual Offenders' subsection 'Coercive Control Theory'.

However, Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) found that having a co-perpetrator is not necessarily only related to sexual offending and that it may also be related to general female criminal behaviour. According to Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009), "[b]oth the female sexual offenders (61%) and female offenders (45%) group had a high percentage of co-perpetrators" (p.376). These researchers revealed that "... females [are] more likely to be coerced into 'any' criminal activity by a co-perpetrator than males, or that they may justify/excuse their behaviour by having an accomplice" (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009, p.376).

Despite the finding that females are generally coerced into any criminal activity by male co-offenders, Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) show that the

presence of a co-perpetrator could have "...potential implications for criminal charges, sentencing, and treatment of female sexual offenders and should therefore be investigated" (p.369). However, Vandiver's (2006) findings, as discussed in Chapter Two under the heading 'Underreporting of Female Sexual Offenders' subsection 'Professional Bias' show that females who have co-offenders are seen as less culpable than their male co-offenders.

Muskens et al.'s (2011) study found that the majority (60) of the offenders studied committed a sexual offence with at least one male and/or female accomplice. According to Muskens et al. (2011), this finding corresponds with previous research. The result of having a male co-offender is that choosing a female victim is more likely, whereas solo female sexual offenders are more likely to choose male victims (Muskens et al., 2011). Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) found that "... the majority of the female co-offenders were accompanied by at least one male accomplice, possibly indicating that gender of the victim depends largely upon whether the female sexual offender was accompanied by a male accomplice" (p.376).

Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) also found that co-offenders are more likely to victimise relatives, whereas solo female sexual offenders are more likely to victimise non-related individuals. Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) state with regard to the choice of victim that "... this may suggest solo-offenders and co-offenders may differ in the initiation of the offence" (p.376). Furthermore, Muskens et al. (2011) mention that

... as hypothesized by Vandiver (2006) it may be that male accomplices initiate the sexual offence and that the female co-offenders participate less in the initiation of the offence, and co-offend out of fearfulness of rejection by or

separation from her accomplice or willingness to please her male co-offender.  
(p.376)

According to Beech et al. (2009), there are two types of female sexual offenders, firstly those whose sole motivating factors was sexual gratification and another for who sexual motivation co-existed with the motivation of fear which as a result of coercion by a violent co-perpetrator” . These findings are comparable to the research conducted on Vandiver (2006) as discussed in Chapter Two under the heading of ‘Typologies of Female Sexual Offenders’, which indicates that there are a variety of motivations for a female sexual offender committing sexual abuse. From the ten research articles that were analysed in this study it was found that four studies (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Muskens et al., 2011; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011) revealed that the majority of female sexual offenders have co-offenders. The remaining six studies (Beech et al., 2009; Christopher et al., 2007; Elliot et al., 2010; Lawson, 2008; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002) did not mention if the female sexual offender had a co-offender.

**Subtheme: Demographic characteristics of the victims of female sexual offenders.** This theme deals with the biographical characteristics of the victims of female sexual offenders. These characteristics have been included because the demographic characteristics of the victims of female sexual offenders could be used to contribute to an understanding (as defined in Chapter One) of female sexual offending.

**Sub-theme: Age of victim.** Age of the victim refers to the age of the victim at the time the sexual abuse was committed. The age of the victim is significant as it has implications in terms of the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) criteria for a diagnosis of pedophilia. In five of the studies (Christopher et al., 2007; Elliot et

al., 2010; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Wijkman et al., 2011), it was found that the victims of female sexual offenders tend to be under 13 years old. Thus, it seems that female sexual offenders meet the criteria for paedophilia. These criteria have been discussed in detail in Chapter Two under the heading ‘Level III: Micro-Level Theories’.

Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) are unclear regarding the age of the victims. Christopher et al.’s (2007) study simply mentions that the sexual offences studied were committed against minors, which may mean that the offences were perpetrated against people under the age of 18 years old. Therefore, it is unclear whether these offenders fall into the category of paedophilia. Beech et al. (2009), Lawson (2008), and Vandiver and Walker (2002) reveal that the victims studied were under the age of 16 years old, which indicates that the offenders fall into the hebephilia group. Elliot et al.’s (2010) study states that the victims’ ages “... ranged from 6 months to 15 years old” (p.596). According to Vandiver and Walker (2002), the finding that female sexual offenders usually choose victims under the age of 13 years “... supports previous research findings that female sex offenders typically focus on the young, almost to the exclusion of majority-age of victims” (p.295). In half of the studies (Christopher et al., 2007; Elliot et al., 2010; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Wijkman et al., 2011), that were analysed it was found that the victims of female sexual offenders tend to be under 13 years old. One study (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009) did not mention the age of the victim. One of the studies that were analysed (Christopher et al., 2007) did not give a specific age, yet mentioned that the sexual offences were committed against an under 18 year old person. Three of the studies that were analysed (Beech et al., 2009; Lawson, 2008; Vandiver & Walker, 2002) indicated that the victim is generally less than 16 years

old. In one study (Elliot et al., 2010) that was analysed found that victims generally range from 6 months to 15 years old.

**Sub-theme: Sex of victim.** Elliot et al. (2010), Lawson (2008), and Vandiver and Kercher (2004) found that the majority of the victims studied were male. Three other studies (Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Walker, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011) found that the victims were female in the majority of the cases studied. Vandiver and Walker (2002) indicate that “[n]o significant differences were found among the offenders’ preferences of the victims’ sex” (p.295).

Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) found that female sexual offenders offend against both sexes. Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) also mention that “... FSO [female sexual offender] sample had the largest percentage of victimizing both genders” (p.374). Whereas “MSOs [male sexual offenders] ... do appear to prefer female victims, although they too victimise both genders” (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009, p.374).

Vandiver and Kercher’s (2004) study found that the majority of women who abused more than one victim showed a preference for either male or female victims. This finding may indicate that when a female sexual offender is identified as a repetitive criminal, there seems to be a clear preference with regard to the gender of the victim. However, this implication is contrary to previous research which indicates that female sexual offenders usually target victims based on easy access (Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). Thus, female sexual offenders could be predatory by nature according to the Vandiver and Kercher’s (2004) research findings; this is contrary to Vandiver’s (2006) typology on female sexual offenders as discussed in Chapter Two under the heading ‘Typologies of the Female Sexual Offender’.

Female sexual offender's predatory nature is contrary to the findings of Vandiver and Walker's (2002) as well as Vandiver's (2006) typology as this typology does not identify female sexual offenders as being predatory. According to Muskens et al. (2011), solo offenders seem to prefer male victims, whereas co-offenders prefer female victims. Thus, it could be mentioned that co-offending changes the dynamics of the victim-offender relationship, which could have important implications for law enforcement, sentencing, and treatment programmes. The findings of this study on the sex of the victim were inconclusive and did not find any clear preference towards the gender of the victim.

**Subtheme: Relatedness.** Relatedness refers to whether the victim is known or related to the female sexual offender. In four of the studies (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004), the researchers used the terms 'known' and 'related' interchangeably. Thus, the group to which the victims belonged is unclear.

In three studies, namely the studies conducted by Elliot et al. (2010), Nathan and Ward (2002), and Vandiver and Walker (2002), the researchers found that the victims were usually related to the female sexual offenders. These studies made use of terms such as "related" (p.295), "daughter" (p.295), "offended against own children" (p.295), and "against other children within the family" (p.295). Vandiver and Walker (2002) state that "these findings should be interpreted with caution, however, because it appears that only when a familial relationship existed did the police record the relationship" (p.295).

According to Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009), the relatedness of the victim "... could explain victim access. During adolescence both genders may have access to siblings and adult females may maintain their easy access through children

(easy access to biological targets)” (p.374). These findings correspond to the findings of Giguere and Bumby (2007), Grayson (1986), and Vandiver (2006) as discussed in Chapter Two. As mentioned above, it is evident that female sexual offenders are less likely than male sexual offenders to be predatory, which is evident in Vandiver and Walker’s (2002) study. They state that “... 15 of 16 offender’s victimized relatives, they were much less likely to be arrested for offences involving strangers, indicating that females may not be as predatory as males” (Vandiver & Walker, 2006, p.295). Nathan and Ward’s (2002) study also shows that “... the 12 offenders offended against 20 known victims. Mothers molested 11 of these victims” (p.14). The researchers do not adequately define what is meant by ‘known victims’.

Vandiver and Kercher’s (2004) state that female sexual offenders are more likely than male sexual offenders to be known to or biologically related to their victims. This tendency may further contribute to why female sexual offending is often unreported as victims who are known to the perpetrators may be less likely to report such offences. The underreporting of female sexual offending is discussed in detail in Chapter Two under the heading of ‘The Underreporting of Female Sexual Offenders’.

Vandiver and Kercher (2004) finding that female sexual offender’s victims are often known to them was also found in Lawson’s (2008) study – the victims were found to be well known to the female sexual offenders, and they were generally family members, sons and daughters of friends, acquaintances, and children whom the offenders had some authority over. However, Lawson (2008) does not distinguish between related or known victims regarding female sexual offenders. Vandiver and Walker (2002) hypothesise that “... female sexual offenders committed crimes of opportunity. First, they chose victims who are substantially younger... second, usually related to the victim, indicating they chose victims who were highly

accessible, including their own children” (p.298). This indicates that there were no preferences for a specific gender. Muskens et al. (2011) found that co-offenders are more likely to be related to the victims, which seems to correspond with their findings that solo offenders appear to prefer victims who are not related to them.

Therefore, there appears to be a difference regarding the choice of victims of solo offenders and co-offenders. Important variables to determine are whether there are correlations between the victim’s age, gender, relationship with the offender, and the duration of the abuse because knowledge of such factors may contribute to a better understanding of the grooming process used by solo offenders and co-offenders. In this study, three (Elliot et al., 2010; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Walker, 2002), of the studies that were analysed found that the victims were usually related to the female sexual offenders. However it was unclear as to the group to which the victims belonged either ‘known’ and ‘related’. The remaining seven research articles (Beech et al., 2009; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Muskens et al., 2011; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004) did not mention the relatedness of the victim.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the themes that have emerged demonstrated that the female sexual offender cannot be seen in isolation and that the victim as well as the context within which these sexual offences occur should also be taken into account. I have explored the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders, their behaviour in relation to the victim as well as the context in which the sexual abuse occurs. Therefore, the themes that have emerged from the thematic content analysis demonstrate the significance of these interconnecting systems, namely the female sexual offender, the victims, and the context in which the sexual abuse takes place.



The themes have been discussed in an interpretative manner in keeping with the postmodernist paradigm of social constructionism. To further expand on the identified themes, I have given limited examples in the form of direct quotations from the original research reports to verify the findings. In the next chapter, I highlight the strengths and limitation of this study, and I also provide recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

This study has investigated a number of valuable contributions towards creating an understanding of the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders as well as with regard to providing recommendations for further research. The core themes which emerged from the ten research articles are discussed in this chapter in relation to the relevant theories, literature, and South African legislation relating to sexual abuse. Subsequently, the findings, strengths, and limitations of this study are highlighted. The chapter is concluded with recommendations for future research.

### **Discussion of Findings and Links to Literature**

In this study, I set out to explore the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders by using the findings of ten original international research articles. The goal of this research was to consider the similarities and the differences (from a social constructionist perspective) of the findings of the studies published in ten original research articles with the aim to characterise the female sexual offender. I also considered the gaps in the existing literature on female sexual offenders in an attempt to extend the scientific knowledge on female sexual offending.

From this study, three prominent themes emerged. Firstly, the study established the personal characteristics of the female sexual offender. Secondly, the behavioural characteristics of the female sexual offender were examined. Thirdly, the contextual characteristics of the female sexual offender were established. However, I view the division between the themes as superficial as it is impossible to separate themes and subthemes which are closely interlinked and constantly evolving. This view is in line with the social constructionist perspective, as discussed in Chapter

Three, as well as with the systemic perspective, as discussed in Chapter Two. These perspectives mention that an individual should be seen in the context of social interaction instead of isolation (Willig, 2008).

From the social constructionist perspective, individuals' experiences and perceptions are mediated historically, culturally, and linguistically (Willig, 2008). Thus, an individual's experiences are seen as a reflection of their reading and perceptions of their own environmental conditions (Willig, 2008). From the social constructionist perspective, an individual continually makes use of constructed concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of their environment or surroundings (Willig, 2008). Thus, in order to understand the phenomenon of female sexual offending, it is important to consider the personal, behavioural, and contextual characteristics of the female sexual offender. In this study, the female sexual offender is considered in terms of her behavioural and contextual characteristics. The three main themes and their subthemes which have been identified are discussed below.

### **Theme One: Personal Characteristics of the Female Sexual Offender**

This theme surrounds the personal characteristics of the female sexual offender. The personal characteristics of the female sexual offender have been included as a theme with various subthemes namely, age of arrest, race, level of education and childhood experiences (as discussed in Figure 4.1 in Chapter Four) as this theme can be used to provide a behavioural and contextual understanding of female sexual offending as defined in Chapter One. As stated in Chapter Two, information regarding personal characteristics may also add to the existing knowledge of the typologies regarding female sexual offenders proposed by Harris (2010), Mathew et al. (1991), and Vandiver (2006).

In this study, the majority of the cases that were analysed (Elliot et al., 2010; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011) found that the average age of the female sexual offender at the time of arrest ranges from 30 to 35 years old. This finding is contrary to the findings of Vandiver's (2006) study which found that the average age of arrest of the female sexual offender is 26 years old.

In Christopher et al.'s (2007) study, it was also found that when a co-offender is present, the female sexual offender is slightly older at the time of the arrest. However, the studies that were analysed did not mention the female sexual offender's age at the time the sexual abuse was committed, nor did they mention an indication of the duration of the sexual abuse. Furthermore, the studies also did not indicate the period of time between when the sexual offences were reported and when the offenders were arrested for the sexual offences. Factors such as the duration of sexual abuse as well as the period between when the sexual abuse is reported and the time of arrest could have a significant impact on the age of the female sexual offender. It should also be kept in mind that much of the literature on female sexual offenders contains studies that use fairly small samples, which makes it difficult to make conclusions beyond the specific samples.

In this study, the majority of the studies reviewed (Beech et al., 2009; Christopher et al., 2007; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002) indicated that female sexual offenders are generally Caucasian, but further cultural differences were not indicated. The finding that female sexual offenders are Caucasian was confirmed by the research conducted by Vandiver (2006). However, all of the research articles used in this study are international articles, and, as discussed in Chapter Two, various cultural groups

within society may not consider females to be sexual offenders, thus limiting the phenomenon to Caucasians only. This finding may further be influenced by the victims' concerns of reporting the sexual abuse to authorities as victims of different races may feel differently regarding the reporting of sexual abuse.

Half of the studies that were analysed (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Muskens et al., 2011; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Walker, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011) indicated that female sexual offenders have less than a high school qualification in general. In Wijkman et al.'s (2011) study, it was found that 42% of the female sexual offenders studied had below average or borderline intellectual functioning. Although Wijkman et al.'s (2011) study did not comment on the female sexual offenders' levels of education, the findings regarding intellectual capacity may further affect the offenders' levels of education. The level of education of a female sexual offender appears to be a new finding or topic of interest because older research does not comment on the level of education of female sexual offenders. However, it is important to consider the typology of the female sexual offender as proposed by Vandiver (2006) as the level of education of such offenders may determine which group they fall into. For example, a female sexual offender with tertiary education may be placed within the teacher category as proposed by Mathews et al. (1991) (as discussed in Chapter Two). However, female sexual offenders with less than a high school qualification may be more likely to fall within another category.

The analysis of the ten research articles of this study further showed that most of the studies that were analysed (Christopher et al., 2007; Elliot et al., 2010; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011) mentioned that female sexual offenders have a history of childhood abuse. This finding was also indicated in research conducted by Harris (2010) which indicates that

female sexual offenders are often abused either physically or sexually during their childhood years (discussed in Chapter Two). According to Mathew et al. (1992), female sexual offenders who fall within the category of women who abuse young children tend to be more likely to have been sexually abused during their childhood. Davis (2006) considers childhood victimisation to be an important predictive factor in being vulnerable to becoming a female sexual offender.

Harris (2010) and Warren and Hislop (2001) further mention that there is a connection between childhood victimisation and female sexual tendency to sexually abuse younger children. The studies that were analysed did not mention the people who sexually abused the female sexual offenders themselves. In past research, such as the research conducted by Mathew et al. (1991), Miccio-Fonseca (2000), and Terry (2006), it was found that the female sexual offenders studied were generally abused by someone that was known to them, such as a father. Research by Warren and Hislop (2001) states that the family in which the sexual abuse of the female sexual offender takes place tends to demonstrate particular interactional patterns that do not provide the female sexual offender with the opportunity to form a separate identity, nor to form healthy relationships.

The inability of female sexual offenders to form a separate identity may mean that their family systems either have closed boundaries or that the boundaries are too open (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Boundaries that are too open allow too much information to be shared which means that the family members are not protected, whereas boundaries which are too closed mean that no new information will enter the system (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). The implications of boundaries that are too open or too closed are that the members of the family would be unable to form separate

identities, and they would also be unable to define healthy relationships outside of the family.

### **Theme Two: Behavioural Characteristics of the Female Sexual Offender**

Behaviour refers to the manner in which individuals conduct themselves (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). The manner in which an individual behaves or conducts themselves is significant as it demonstrates their impulses, motivations, wishes, drives, and instincts (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Therefore, behaviour is seen as something that can be observed. Behaviour entails acts or omissions of a particular manner in which to one conducts oneself (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). In this study, theme two with its subthemes refers to the offence type, which includes contact crimes, non-contact crimes, prior convictions, the offender's construction of reality, and their constructions of reality in relationships as discussed in Figure 4.1 in Chapter Four.

It was found that female sexual offenders mainly undertake contact crimes as defined in Chapter Four. This finding was evident in six of the studies (Beech et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2010; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002) because it was found by these studies that female sexual offenders mainly commit contact crimes. This result was confirmed by Vandiver's (2006) study which indicates that female sexual abuse covers a wide range of behaviour. However, it is contrary to Grayson's (1989) findings which indicate that females seem to be less likely than males to have a wide range of deviant sexual behaviour.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fourth Edition Text Revised (DSM-IV-TR)(American Psychiatric Association, 2000), offenders who suffer from paedophilia participate in a variety of sexual activities with

children such as undressing the child, exposing their genitals to the child, masturbating in the presence of the child, or touching a child inappropriately. Other offenders may perform fellatio or cunnilingus on the child, or penetrate the child's vagina, mouth, or anus with their fingers, foreign objects, or genital organs (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Only three of the studies (Beech et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2010; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004) found that non-contact crimes are more likely to be committed by female sexual offenders than other offenders. However, it should be noted that the type of sexual abuse that a female sexual offender is likely to engage in may determine the manner in which she chooses her victims. In Giguere and Bumby's (2007) study, it was found that female sexual offenders are more likely to choose victims of the same gender when committing acts of rape.

According to the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a), sexual abuse is defined to include both contact crimes and non-contact crimes (such as rape and compelled rape as well as sexual assault), as was discussed in further detail in Chapter Two. This is an important factor to consider (in other words, whether the sexual abuse is a contact or non-contact crime) as it may have implications for the sentencing of the female sexual offender.

The Criminal Law Amendment Act 105 of 1997 (South Africa, 1997) prescribes a minimum sentence of 25 years for rape (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007). Only if the courts find that there are "substantial and compelling circumstances [which may] ... justify a lesser sentence" (Centre for Applied Legal Studies & Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2007. p. 27) will they deviate from the minimum sentence prescribed. It could further be hypothesised that the type of sexual crime that was inflicted on the victim may further affect the victim's response to the abuse. In research by Gannon et al. (2008), it was



found that victims of sexual abuse may respond to such abuse in three ways, namely being engaged, submissive, or resistant. These responses may further be affected by the type of abuse inflicted on the victim (Gannon et al., 2008).

Furthermore, in three of the articles that were analysed, namely the articles by Beech et al. (2009), Elliot et al. (2010), and Nathan and Ward (2002), it was found that the female sexual offenders studied had prior, non-sexual offences. This is an important factor to consider when taking the typology of female sexual offenders into account. This factor would then place the female sexual offender into the category of a criminal offender as discussed in Chapter Two. The finding that female sexual offenders have a prior criminal record corresponds to the theory of female sexual offending discussed in Chapter Two under the section on micro-level theories. Micro-level theories seek to explore the background factors of female sexual offending (Harris, 2010). These factors include lifestyle outcomes which refer to maladaptive behaviour such as criminal behaviour (Harris, 2010).

In this study, it was revealed that two studies, namely the studies by Elliot et al. (2010) and Muskens et al. (2011), found that female sexual offenders use the following five constructs of reality: children as sexual beings, nature of harm, entitlement, dangerous world construct, and the uncontrollability construct. These two studies indicated that the dangerous world construct and the uncontrollability construct were less common than the other constructs, particularly amongst solo female sexual offenders (Elliot et al., 2010; Muskens et al., 2011).

According to Harris (2010) and Ford (2010), cognitive distortions are frequently reported in the literature regarding male and female sexual offenders. A further finding from the analysis of the articles was that, according to Lawson (2008), female sexual offenders tend to construct their reality regarding relationships in a

different way when compared to male sexual offenders. Lawson (2008) found that female sexual offenders' constructions of their social relationships severely affect their chance of satisfying their physical and personal needs. Lawson (2008) further found that female sexual offenders want to be intimate with others, but seem to be unable to express their desire for intimacy, understanding, empathy, and competency adequately. Lawson's (2008) findings may be linked to the social constructionist perspective which indicates that individual's co-construct meaning within their relationships (McNamee & Gergen, 1993). Thus, reality is a product of the particular system in question (McNamee & Gergen, 1993).

### **Theme Three: Contextual Characteristics of the Female Sexual Offender**

The terms 'behavioural' and 'contextual' are interlinked and, therefore, should not be seen in isolation. The reason for this interlinked relationship is because the term 'contextual' refers to something which is related to something else, or something that depends on something else (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). Therefore, the context refers to the surrounding circumstances, in this case, the circumstances of female sexual offenders. Thus, the circumstances of female sexual offenders are linked to their behavioural characteristics.

In this study, the contextual characteristics of the female sexual offender are divided into the following subthemes as discussed in Figure 4.1 in Chapter Four: relationship status, co-offending, demographic characteristics of the victims of female sexual offenders, the age of the victims, the sex of the victims, and relatedness. The contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders are discussed below.

The relationship status of female sexual offenders is an important subtheme that was identified in four of the studies (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al.; 2011). These studies found that female

sexual offenders are either married or in a relationship at the time the sexual offence is committed (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011). As mentioned above, it is unclear whether the female sexual offenders studied by these researchers had co-offenders. Furthermore, the nature of the relationship between the female sexual offender and their co-offender is also unclear. For example, it is unclear if there was an abusive relationship between the offender and co-offender.

I hypothesise that the presence of a co-offender could have an impact on the contextual characteristics of female sexual offending. For example, factors such as whether the sexual abuse started during, before, or after a marriage could each provide a different understanding of female sexual offending. The presence of a co-offender may also be linked with the coercive control theory as well as the Power and Control Wheel as discussed in Chapter Two. The coercive control theory suggests that the power of fear plays a significant part in the behavioural and psychological processes of an abused woman (Herman, 1992). The behavioural and psychological changes in an abused woman could further be explained by using Pense and Paymar's (1993, cited in Tolman et al., 1999) typology of the power and control wheel which further states that abusive behaviour (such as coercion, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, misuse of children, abuse of male privilege, and economic abuse) is an abuser's way of keeping control over their partner.

Relationship status as a subtheme could also be linked to the next subtheme which considers whether female sexual offenders have co-offenders. The presence of a co-offender is a subtheme which emerged in four of the studies (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Muskens et al., 2011; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011). These studies found that the majority of female sexual offenders have co-offenders

(Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Muskens et al., 2011; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011). My expectation was that more of the studies would have focused on whether there was a co-offender. I also expected more of the studies to explore the relationship between the female sexual offender and her co-offender.

According to research conducted by Crawford (2010), sexual abuse committed by a female offender is generally considered to be a result of fear, coercion, loneliness, and the perception that they need to please their partners. The coercion of female sexual offenders by a male co-offender was further confirmed by Gannon et al. (2008) who identified the directed avoidance offender's stable patterns in female sexual offending. This category of female sexual offender refers to a female offender who is directed by a male co-offender (Gannon et al., 2008).

The findings of Gannon et al.'s (2008) study and the findings of Vandiver's (2006) typology are similar. Vandiver's (2006) typology further divides female sexual offenders who have co-offenders into the following three categories: male-accompanied familial, male-accompanied non-familial, and male-accompanied rejected/revengeful. Furthermore, the findings of these studies are similar to Harris' (2010) distinction between the male-coerced offender and the male-accompanied offender. A detailed explanation of these various categories is given and discussed in Chapter Two.

According to Mathew et al. (1991), male-coerced female sexual offenders usually commit acts of sexual abuse because of extreme emotional dependency on their partners as well as because they fear abandonment. Extreme emotional dependency on their partners and a fear of abandonment could further be explained by the coercive control theory (Herman, 1992) and the power and control wheel (Doerner & Lab, 2012) as mentioned and discussed in Chapter Two.

The contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders further include the demographic characteristics of the victims (including the age of the victim, the sex of the victim, and relatedness). These factors have been used as they provide a behavioural and contextual understanding (as defined in Chapter One) of female sexual offending. In this study, five of the studies (Christopher et al., 2007; Elliot et al., 2010; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Wijkman et al., 2011) that were analysed found that the victims of female sexual offenders tend to be under 13 years old. In terms of the criteria as set out in the DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), which is the manual that would have been used when these studies were conducted, the results indicate that the criteria for paedophilia would have been met.

This finding could also be considered in relation to cognitive distortions, as discussed in Chapter Two. The presence of these cognitive distortions indicates that female sexual offenders tend to perceive their victims as sexual beings, despite the victims being of a young age. According to Mathews et al.'s (1991) study, it was found that females who sexually abuse children usually suffer from a personality disorder and that such females show signs of low self-esteem, and feelings of insecurity, dependency, and shame – all of which may further make these offenders more vulnerable to forming cognitive distortions.

A further subtheme that was found was relatedness. In this study, in three of the articles reviewed, namely the articles by Elliot et al. (2010), Nathan and Ward (2002), and Vandiver and Walker (2002), it was found that the victims studied were generally related to the female sexual offender. This subtheme links to the typology of female sexual offenders as discussed in Chapter Two. Vandiver (2006) found that either the mother or the father was the coercer of the sexual abuse. According to

Vandiver (2006), the mother may initially be the initiator of the sexual abuse as she may feel dependent, or she may wish to nurture her own child. This finding correlates with the subtheme of cognitive distortion and the nature of harm construct which indicate that a female sexual offender may not view the sexual abuse as harmful, and instead they may perceive the abuse as showing love and affection towards the child (Ford, 2010). Travin et al. (1990) and Warren and Hislop (2001) further hypothesise that the female sexual offender may also be re-enacting sexual abuse that she may have been exposed to during her own childhood.

The victim's relation to the female sexual offender should also be considered in relation to the impact it may have on the victims of female sexual offending. According to Terry's (2006) study, the victim may be unwilling to report the abuse as the offender may be the victim's mother or caregiver. Saradjian (2010) states that a child would be reluctant to report sexual abuse in this case because, if they do report such abuse, their security and survival needs would be jeopardised.

I am of the opinion that the victim's age and whether they are related to the female sexual offender may have an impact on the long-term effects of female sexual offending as well as whether the victim would be willing to report the sexual abuse to authorities. It is my hypothesis that these factors may further correspond to the gender of the victim because female victims may be more willing to report sexual abuse than male victims because of society's constructions of gender. In this study, it was found that there were no significant gender differences regarding whether the victim was male or female. This finding was contrary to research conducted by Rudin et al. (1995) and Vandiver (2006) which found that more females were sexually abused than males.

In summary, according to the findings from the ten research articles that were analysed through the application of thematic content analysis, it appears that female sexual offenders can be characterised as discussed below.

From this study, three prominent themes emerged, namely the personal characteristics of female sexual offenders, the behavioural characteristics of female sexual offenders, and the contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders. These three themes are closely interlinked and connected. Therefore, they cannot be seen in isolation. Each theme has an impact on the others as well as the subthemes of each. Thus, from a social constructionist perspective, the individual's experiences (in this case, the female sexual offender's experiences) cannot be seen in isolation as individual behaviour is always determined by the person's context and vice versa. The personal characteristics of female sexual offenders appear to indicate that the age group of the offenders at the time of the first arrest ranges from 30 to 35 years old (Elliot et al., 2010; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011). However, if a co-offender is present, the female sexual offender will generally be younger than the age group specified above (Christopher et al., 2007). It was also found that female sexual offenders are generally Caucasian and have less than a high school qualification (Beech et al., 2009; Christopher et al., 2007; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002). It was further found that female sexual offenders tend to have a history of childhood sexual abuse (Christopher et al., 2007; Elliot et al., 2010; Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011).

The behavioural characteristics of female sexual offenders tend to indicate that female sexual offenders generally commit contact crimes. It was further found that the

female sexual offender is likely to have prior non-sexual offences (Nathan & Ward, 2002; Beech et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2010). However, the remaining seven research articles (Christopher et al., 2007; Johansson-Love, 2009; Lawson, 2008; Muskens et al., 2011; Vandiver & Walker, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Wijkman et al., 2011) that were analysed did not mention whether the female sexual offender had prior convictions or not.

The contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders indicate that they are either in a relationship or married at the time that the sexual offence is committed (Beech et al., 2009; Elliot et al., 2010; Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002). Another contextual characteristic is the presence of a co-offender during the commission of the sexual abuse (Johansson-Love & Fremouw, 2009; Muskens et al., 2011; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Wijkman et al., 2011). The victims of female sexual offenders tend to be under the age of 13 years old and are usually related to the offenders (Christopher et al., 2007; Elliot et al., 2010; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Wijkman et al., 2011). No significant gender differences regarding the victims were found.

### **Strengths of the Study**

This study gave me the opportunity to explore the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders by analysing ten original research articles through the use of thematic content analysis. This type of research is vital in South Africa as South Africa has one of the highest rates of reported sexual abuse in the world (Kramer & Bowman, 2010). Yet, very little is known about the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders (Kramer, 2011).

It also appears that sexual abuse committed by female sexual offenders has not been consistently reported by the victims of such abuse because of the stigma attached



to such abuse and the social construction of the female figure. In turn, the stigma attached to such abuse and the social construction/s of the female figure both contribute to the underreporting of female sexual abuse, in particular. Since 2000, there has been an increase in the number of articles written about females who sexually offend, but many aspects regarding female sexual offending remain unanswered and unexplored (Kramer, 2011). However, most of this research is international. Articles written on the topic of female sexual offenders in South Africa mainly surround the aspect of the social construction as well as the public and professional opinion regarding female sexual offenders.

Although the social constructions as well as the public and professional opinion regarding female sexual offenders remain an important dimension to consider, the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders remain largely unexplored within the South African context. By not exploring these characteristics, novel understandings of female sexual offenders cannot be obtained. If the research on female sexual offenders in a South African context remains limited, it will create more room for misconceptions of female sexual offenders to arise, which may also contribute to shaming the victims of these offenders and may result in sexual abuse not being reported. It is important for professionals working in the field of female sexual offending to identify accurately and to intervene effectively in cases where children are sexual abused by a female sexual offender.

This study provides the opportunity to explore a different dimension of female sexual offending, in other words, the behavioural and contextual characteristics of the female sexual offender. Previously typologies such as Harris' (2010) typology and Vandiver's (2006) typology have been used to describe female sexual offending. The depiction of female sexual offenders through these typologies created the opportunity

to gain a more descriptive understanding of female sexual offenders. These descriptions could further be understood by including the family systems perspective and by highlighting the multiple and interrelated factors involved in female sexual offending.

I also employed a qualitative research approach which meant that an in-depth understanding of the complexities and processes of the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offending could be explored. By using this approach, I was able to describe and understand the ten original research articles rather than simply using the findings to consider cause and affect relationships which could be used to predict human behaviour. This approach was also used to gain a holistic perspective of the phenomenon under study.

The method of gathering the data, namely a systematic review of the ten original research articles, was used in order to synthesise various sources of qualitative research as well as to generate new knowledge and insights regarding the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders. By combining and summarising the findings of previous studies, I was able to identify main themes and subthemes which created a fuller understanding of female sexual offenders. I obtained these themes and subthemes by applying thematic content analysis to the ten research articles, as discussed in Chapter Four. This process also gave me the opportunity to explore the similarities and differences of the findings of the ten research articles with the aim to characterise the female sexual offender. The process could be seen as contributing to potential further research on the topic, which could provide an additional understanding of the phenomenon regarding the reasons for certain dimensions remaining relatively unexplored.

Furthermore, the process created an opportunity to consider possible gaps in the literature on female sexual offenders, which could be used to consider recommendations for further scientific research as well as for employing various other research methods to gain an advanced understanding of female sexual offenders' behavioural and contextual characteristics. Such an understanding would add to the scientific body of knowledge on this phenomenon, and it would make new contributions to the field of clinical psychology, criminology, and law as all of these subjects are closely intertwined with regard to the topic of female sexual offenders.

An additional strength of this study is that I ensured that the research data was of a high professional quality by ensuring that credibility and trustworthiness were maintained throughout the research process. I always attempted to provide factually accurate information and to ensure that the information used was used in its totality. Furthermore, I attempted to present all sides of the information to the reader to offer a holistic view on the subject. I also made use of social constructionism as a paradigm which embraces the idea that there is no single truth, but instead that truth is seen in multiplicity. Consequently, the information and data was used in an interactive process and was seen to evolve constantly. This view also gave me the opportunity to disclose my research orientation as well as my background which are factors may have had an impact on the research findings.

This voluntary disclosure as well as the awareness of my background and the chosen research approaches further contributed to the trustworthiness of the study by providing the reader with transparency regarding the factors that may have affected the findings of the study. By making use of social constructionism, I could add to my understanding and experience of the field of female sexual offending. Furthermore, I

could question this phenomenon which was largely an unexplored subject for me before I began conducting this research.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, there are many ethical considerations that need to be addressed to ensure that the rights and dignity of the offenders, the offenders' families, the victims, the victims' family, and the professionals that work with this population are upheld at all times. By undertaking a systematic review of the chosen research articles, I was able to maintain the rights and dignity of these people while still being able to add to the scientific body of knowledge on the subject. The rights and dignity of the participants studied by the original research articles were further upheld as I ensured that the studies reported on in the research articles were ethically approved by the relevant ethical committees of the institutions of the researchers involved. The ethical approval regarding the research articles contributed to identifying key areas for future research. Furthermore, ethical concerns and practices may also have assisted the researchers responsible for the research articles to identify possible ethical dilemmas and manners in which to research this phenomenon to ensure that the rights and dignity of the people involved were respected. I have also taken steps to determine whether the original research articles adhered to ethical requirements to ensure that unethically obtained information was not used in this study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although I was able to contribute to the scientific body of knowledge, I acknowledge that I have only been able to use a small sample of research articles. It is possible that I would have found different conclusions which may have further added to the scientific body of knowledge on the phenomenon if I had used more research articles. However, as previously mentioned, it was not my intention to generalise the

findings of this research. Instead the aim of the study was to generate an in-depth understanding of the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders according to the findings of the chosen articles. A further aim was to identify recommendations for further research.

By using the social constructionism research paradigm, I am aware that my interpretations and the re-production of my findings have been influenced by my own interpretations, perceptions, background, and values. My clinical psychology training may also have influenced the findings of the research and thus also the themes and subthemes that I found. It is also possible that other researchers may have highlighted and included different themes and subthemes than those I have included. However, I have also mentioned this fact as a possible limitation of my study as the main aim of the study was to identify the possibilities for additional research that may create different dimensions and understandings of the phenomenon of female sexual offenders.

A further limitation of this study was that the analysis was conducted on previously analysed data. This process means that the data was already interpreted by the original researchers. Therefore, some of the original information may not have been reported holistically. However, I took numerous steps to address this limitation, for example, I only included original ethically approved research, which means that I had to provide the information holistically and that I could not only focus on information that met my particular research aims. Furthermore, the research articles were ethically approved, which means that the professional standards of the profession were not comprised by using studies that did not maintain the rights and dignity of the participants involved.

Furthermore, the research was also conducted by using only international research articles. Thus, the research excluded the occurrence of the phenomenon in a South African context, which is a further limitation of the study. The behavioural and contextual characteristics that may have been more in line with the diverse cultural practices within South Africa may also have been excluded through this process. However, I attempted to access South African research articles, but none were found that were suitable for this study as they did not meet the selection criteria identified.

Although the above factors may be limitations, they may also be seen as a major driving factor for undertaking the research. The findings of this study also attempted to add to the South African scientific body of knowledge by including recommendations for further studies that could be used within the South African research field. I also attempted to increase the South African body of knowledge on the subject by including sexual abuse statistics and by making reference to female sexual abuse in the media. These factors highlight the need to conduct further scientific research on this phenomenon from a South African perspective.

A final limitation in conducting the study as a meta-analysis was the selection bias that may have occurred as a result of choosing the studies to be included in the research. According to Walker, Hernandez, and Kattan (2008), the identification phase regarding research articles usually results in a long list of potential studies which can be used – some of which may be directly related to the topic. These researchers recommend that it is important for the criteria to be defined clearly to avoid selection bias during this phase (Walker et al., 2008). In this study, I sought to eliminate selection bias by initially undertaking a thorough literature review of the relevant and available literature on female sexual offenders. From this literature

review, I specified the selection criteria which made it possible to include and exclude various research articles.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study made a number of contributions to understanding female sexual offenders, particularly the behavioural and contextual characteristics of these offenders. However, there are still a number of dimensions which have not been analysed which could add to the scientific body of knowledge on this phenomenon, particularly with regard to the cultural differences within the South African context. The recommendations for future studies are discussed below with reference to the studies that have been analysed.

Although research on female sexual offenders should be undertaken within the South African context, I could not find South African studies on the behavioural and contextual characteristics of the female sexual offender during my search for applicable studies. By undertaking a study on female sexual offenders within the South African context, new dimensions such as cultural differences as well as legal implications pertaining to the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) could be explored (such as defining sexual abuse according to South African legislation).

In the majority of the studies that were analysed, particularly the studies by Beech et al. (2009), Christopher et al. (2007), Lawson (2008), Muskens et al. (2011), Nathan and Ward (2002), Vandiver and Walker (2002), and Wijkman et al. (2011), the researchers did not mention whether the female sexual offenders studied abused substances. However, in Nathan and Ward's (2002) study, as well as in Wijkman et al.'s (2011) study, it was found that female sexual offenders are less likely to abuse alcohol and other narcotics. According to Johansson-Love and Fremouw's (2009) study, it is

...unclear if they refer to history of substance abuse or substance abuse during the crime. Hislop (2001) reported that many case reports indicated that many female sex offenders had a history of alcohol and drug abuse and used substances during the commission of the crime. (p. 372)

Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) further revealed that "...the ability to experience the sexual acts may be more important to the sexual offender, and substance abuse may interfere with this, rather than reduce inhibitions" (p. 372). Therefore, "...the female sexual offender's group and female offender group reported more drug abuse than alcohol abuse in comparison to males which is a new finding that should be investigated in future studies." (Johansson-Love and Fremouw, 2009, p. 373). These findings are contrary to Nathan and Ward's (2002) findings and Wijkman et al.'s (2011) findings.

Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) hypothesised that the reason for this difference may be that

... substance abuse may not play as large of a role within the sex offender population as within other criminal groups because sex offences may be motivated by sexual drives while 'other' crimes are often motivated/related to substance abuse/addiction. Although previous researchers have mentioned a function of alcohol and substances as a dis-inhibitor, this may be less important in a sexual crime. (p. 374)

An important gap in the literature is the need for research regarding the abuse of substances, particularly whether substance abuse prevalence differs between female solo sexual offenders and females who have co-offenders. This factor would be interesting to explore particularly since it was found that females with male co-offenders are more likely to use substances to gain compliance from their victims.



It would also be important to consider whether female sexual offenders make use of substances during the commission of the offence/s. The available literature indicates that substance abuse may be a vulnerability factor according to Harris' (2010) theory. Although information relating to substance abuse may be beyond the scope of the study, it could be an important variable for future studies to investigate.

Nathan and Ward's (2002) study found that psychiatric history is unlikely to be found prior to an offence. Thus, only once female sexual offenders have been apprehended (and once they have been evaluated) does it become apparent that there is a psychiatric problem (Nathan & Ward, 2002). Nathan and Ward (2002) revealed that, subsequent to sexual abuse, psychiatric illness (such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders) is found. However, Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) indicated that female sexual offenders do not appear to have more anxiety disorders, such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), than other offenders. It should be kept in mind that these disorders often only become apparent when the offender comes into contact with the criminal justice system.

The findings of Nathan and Ward's (2002) study are contrary to Wijkman et al.'s (2011) study which revealed that 50% of female sexual offenders studied had an Axis I diagnosis (such as depression and alcohol addiction) according to the DSM-IV-TR classification system, or an Axis II disorder (such as mental retardation or a personality disorder). Elliot et al. (2010) found that depression was reported in the sample across all groups, regardless of whether the people involved were sexual offenders or not. Only 19% of the sample had co-morbidities, which meant that they had both an Axis I as well as an Axis II diagnosis according to the DSM-IV-TR classification system (Elliot et al., 2010). Only three reported cases in the sample

were diagnosed with paraphilias (Elliot et al., 2010). According to Wijkman et al. (2011), women are diagnosed less often than men with a paraphilia.

Johansson-Love and Fremouw (2009) mentioned that “future research should attempt to use standardized measures of DSM-IV diagnoses made by mental health professionals to clarify this issue” (p. 374). Whereas Christopher et al. (2007) state that “... [by] limiting our sample to a prison population ... [which may have affected the results of the study] one might expect more severe problems with personality pathology and a history of sexual abuse as well” (p. 881). Therefore, future research should include the classification systems and criteria used to describe psychiatric symptoms.

The studies by Beech et al. (2009), Christopher et al. (2007), Elliot et al., (2010), Lawson (2008), Muskens et al., (2011), Vandiver and Kercher (2004), Vandiver and Walker (2002), and Wijkman et al. (2011) did not comment on the duration of the abuse. However, the duration of the abuse may be considered an important dimension to consider as part of the grooming process as well as with regard to the extent of the abuse. The exploration of the grooming process as well as the duration of the abuse may provide valuable additional information on the grooming strategies, the extent of abuse, the victim-offender relationship, and the context and severity of the abuse. Vandiver and Walker’s (2002) study reported that abuse usually takes place for less than an hour to several years. The duration of the abuse would be an interesting component to explore regarding which types of offences (such as contact or non-contact crimes) are committed and the relationship between these offences. By establishing an understanding of the types of offences as well as the duration of the abuse, the information may inform treatment programmes designed for victims as well as sentencing implications for the female sexual offender.

With regard to future research, it is also important to consider the context in which the sexual abuse takes place. This component could add to an understanding of the grooming process and the vulnerability of victims of female sexual offenders.

Nathan and Ward's (2002) study, as well as Lawson's (2008) study, found that abuse most often takes place in the offender's home. The offenders studied appeared to have committed the abuse in the capacity of a baby sitter (Lawson, 2008; Nathan & Ward, 2002). It can be hypothesised that there is a connection between the relationship and the context in which abuse occurs. This finding is confirmed by Harris's (2010) study and Ford's (2010) research which mention that female sexual offenders usually have easy access to children and are not predatory. This finding is further discussed in Chapter Four. However, where there is a co-offender, the abuse may take place within a different context such as at the perpetrator's home. The context in which the sexual abuse occurs deserves further exploration, particularly with regard to solo female sexual offenders and female sexual offenders who have co-offenders.

Only one of the studies, namely the study by Wijkman et al. (2011), mentioned additional crimes that were related to the offence and included this variable as part of the sexual abuse. These crimes included verbal and physical violence (Wijkman et al., 2011). The research regarding the commission of additional crimes in the context of female sexual abuse could be an additional component in creating an understanding of and description of female sexual abuse. Such research could further bring about an understanding of the impact of the sexual abuse coupled with the effect of the additional crimes on the victim. The possibility of female sexual abuse having an effect on the victims is contrary to the literature which suggests that female sexual abuse is less harmful towards the victim than male sexual offending (Hetherington, 1999;

Vandiver, 2006). According to Beech et al.'s (2009) study, it was found that both male and female sexual offenders are similar in their verbal and physical abuse of the victim.

An important dimension that could also add to the understanding of female sexual offenders is whether the offenders were employed and the types of employment that these offenders were mostly likely to be involved in at the time of the commission of the offence. In the majority of the studies (Beech et al., 2009; Christopher et al., 2007; Elliot et al., 2010; Muskens et al., 2011; Nathan & Ward, 2002; Vandiver & Kercher, 2004; Vandiver & Walker, 2002) employment was not specified. However, employment could be an important variable to consider in establishing whether there is a connection between certain types of employment and sexual offending (such as, if the female sexual offender was employed as a prostitute, would the sexual abuse only occur in the context of her work activities?).

This factor may become particularly important when taking the Sexual Offences Act (South Africa, 2007a) into consideration as this Act makes provision for the National Register of Sexual Offenders which allows employers to establish whether a prospective employee's name is on the list. This factor may be particularly important in cases where a person applies for employment that involves interacting with children (such as in the case of a teacher). Information regarding employment may also be additional information that can be added to the typology suggested by Mathew et al. (1991).

In one study, namely Lawson's (2008) study, employment was a variable. It was found that most of the female sexual offenders studied were unemployed at the time of the commission of the crime (Lawson, 2008). This variable could also be connected to recreational activities which appeared to occur primarily in the context

of isolation. The employment status of the female sexual offender could contribute to the vulnerability factors as described by Harris (2010) in the pre-offence stage. It would also be interesting to consider which type of profession female sexual offenders are most likely to be involved in. In Johansson-Love and Fremouw's (2009) study, it was found that 42% of the female sexual offenders studied had minimal employment. Whereas Wijkman et al.'s (2011) study revealed that 13% of the female offenders studied had been involved in prostitution. It is unclear in Wijkman et al.'s (2011) study whether being involved in prostitution was connected with the commission of sexual offences.

Such connections may also influence whether the sexual offences that these females were convicted of were hands-off or hands-on offences. It can be hypothesised that there may be a connection between the female sexual offender's type of employment and the typologies these offenders are classified under. Furthermore, these factors could also have an effect on the type of sexual offences that are perpetrated by female sexual offenders. Another important dimension could be to consider the manner in which female sexual offenders become involved in prostitution. One could further hypothesise that these female sexual offenders themselves were victims of human trafficking or were coerced into prostitution. This process could be explained by Herman's (1992) coercive control theory or Doerner and Lab's (2012) Power and Control Wheel.

A final recommendation for future studies is that more research from an insider perspective, such as considering the family of origin of the female sexual offender, should be conducted. This perspective could contribute to a better understanding of the female sexual offender. It is evident that the available literature and the studies that were analysed do not consider the family of origin of the female

sexual offender nor her experience of her family of origin. These factors could create an important understanding of the manner in which these offenders form and perceive relationships, as discussed in Chapter Two. It would be interesting to consider the dynamics of the family of a female sexual offender by using a family systems perspective. Such an exploration would be particularly interesting within the South African context as one would be able to take diverse cultural practices into consideration. Furthermore, by using the family systems perspective, further research could explore the role which childhood sexual abuse plays within the family of origin of the female sexual offender.

### **Conclusion**

The themes and subthemes that were identified in this study represent a valuable contribution to creating an understanding of the contextual and behavioural characteristics of female sexual offenders. This study also provided an opportunity to explore a new dimension of female sexual offending and gave a voice to the phenomenon within the South African research field by defining sexual abuse through the use of South African legislation as well as by making recommendations that could further the understanding of female sexual offending within the South African context.

By exploring the phenomenon with the use of a qualitative research method, I was able to gain a holistic understanding of female sexual offending. The systematic review of the research articles also made it possible to combine and to summarise the findings of the research articles as well as to explore the similarities and differences of these research articles and to identify the possible gaps in the literature that could be studied in the future. A possible limitation of the study was that a rather small and limited sample was used. However, the aim of the research was not to generalise the

findings. Instead, it was to gain an in-depth understanding of the behavioural and contextual characteristics of female sexual offenders. I also took into consideration the possible ethical implications attached to the research, and I ensured that the research was credible and trustworthy at all times by taking steps to avoid selection bias.

It is recommended that further research considers the female sexual offender within the South African context. In addition to this recommendation, substance use and the context in which substances are used should be explored as well as the psychiatric history of the female sexual offender prior to being apprehended for a sexual offence. Furthermore, it is recommended that substance abuse problems which emerge after the offender is apprehended for a sexual offence should be analysed.

It appears that the grooming process used by female sexual offenders remains unique. Aspects such as where the abuse takes place and which additional crimes are committed in the process of the sexual abuse deserve further exploration. The offender's employment status as well as the type of employment may also have an impact on the offending process and should be explored. Such an exploration would add to an understanding of female sexual offending as well as to the typologies regarding female sexual offenders.

A final recommendation for future research would be for such research to be conducted using an insider perspective, namely a qualitative approach. Such research should also explore the female sexual offenders' family of origin by using the family systems perspective. These approaches could provide invaluable insight into the female sexual offender's formation of and perception of relationships. Such insight may include insight into their relationships with their victims as well as their co-perpetrators. It would be particularly valuable to undertake such a study as it

would allow one to take the diverse cultural practices within South Africa and their implications with regard to this phenomenon into consideration.



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